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The Fall of Monte Cassino

Robert Michulec & Dmitriy Zgonnik

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Text by Robert Michulec
Edited by Gordon Rottman
Color Plates by Dmitriy Zgonnik

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Introduction

After landing at Salerno on 9 September 1943, the Allies drove north against the defending German Fourteenth Army. The Italians were out of the picture as they had surrendered to the Allies on the eve of the invasion. The US Fifth Army was on the western side of the central mountain range extending the length of the boot of Italy. The British Eighth Army was on the eastern side of the mountain spine. The Germans prepared a series of defensive lines, making excellent use of the rugged terrain for fortified positions and obstacles. Each defensive barrier would be bitterly fought over before the Germans withdrew to the next prepared line. The cost was high to the Allies in men and materiel. In September the German plan was to buy time for the building of the Winter Line, also called the Gustav Line, south of Rome. It would be built on particularly defendable terrain. Not just the heights were incorporated into the defense, but rivers as well. Some valleys and other low areas were flooded. The Winter Line would be reinforced by the coming winter weather, which would greatly hamper Allied actions, movement, logistics, and air support. The Allied plan was to reach Rome in October 1943, which was far too optimistic.

The Winter Line was reached by the Allies in December 1943 and even breached in the east by the British. The western portion of the line though was the most heavily defended sector and blocked the road to Rome. The brutal winter arrived and brought the Allies to a near standstill. The linchpin of the Winter Line was Monte Cassino, near its center, and the surrounding terrain. Four battles would be fought to breach the line and take Monte Cassino between 17 January and 18 May 1944. The participants would represent the full spectrum of the Allied nations. To support the attack on the Winter Line a second Allied landing was made at Anzio on 22 January. This was northwest of Monte Cassino and only about 25 miles southeast of Rome. It soon became bogged down against determined German resistance. It did have the benefit of drawing troops out of the Winter Line and reducing German reserves to counter any breakthrough.

The first attack on Monte Cassino, commencing on 17 January 1944, was led by II US Corps and supported by the French Expeditionary Corps. Despite valiant efforts the attack failed and the US troops were relieved by the New Zealand Corps (which included an Indian division) on 11 February. The second battle began with the controversial bombing of the great Abbey of Monte Cassino on 15 February by the US Army Air Forces at the request of the Indian division commander and New Zealand corps commander. It was believed that the 150-foot high, 10-foot thick masonry walls and the deep vaults provided the Germans with an impregnable fortress. To this day it has not been clearly determined if it was actually occupied by the Germans. The New Zealand and Indian attack began on 17 February and had failed by the next day. The Allies now determined that the winter conditions and the stubbornness of the defense necessitated waiting for more suitable weather. (The Germans considered the first and second battles together to be the "first battle" and called the third battle the "second.")

The first and second battles had seen attempts to force the Rapido River south of Cassino town and a "right hook" to the north of Monte Cassino. The third battle would be executed by double thrusts north of Cassino town. The New Zealand Corps would lead the attempt, this time reinforced by a British division. The attack began on 15 March and was initially successful, but a German counterattack cost the Commonwealth troops the initiative and the attack was called off on the 20th. It would be almost two months before the fourth and final battle for Monte Cassino. Allied reinforcements were desperately needed and fair weather was essential for air support, directing artillery, logistics movement, and to allow effective tactical maneuver by ground troops and vehicles. Additionally, the cold and wet Italian winter had exhausted and numbed attacking troops, who quickly lost their effectiveness.

II Polish Corps

After the 1939 German and Soviet invasions of Poland tens of thousands of Polish servicemen escaped to the West. Polish troops who escaped to Britain after the fall of France formed the nucleus of a new formation, I Polish Corps. In addition, large numbers of Polish troops were interned by the USSR in 1939. The Soviets formed and equipped some Polish units for their own use against the Germans, but they did not necessarily trust them and had no desire for a large Polish force in their midst. At the same time the British were in desperate need of additional troops. The Poles, if released by the Soviets, would free up other Commonwealth forces that were guarding the strategic oilfields in Iran and Iraq. In April 1942 the Soviets released 26,000 Polish prisoners to organize two divisions in Uzbekistan and then moved to Iraq for training and equipping. There they were joined by another 44,000 troops and 26,000 civilians. The British had originally been equipping Free French formations in North Africa, but in 1943 this responsibility was assumed by the US, giving the British the opportunity to equip the Poles more lavishly, though some of the equipment came from American sources. With training completed in June 1943, it was decided at the Quebec Conference to deploy the new II Polish Corps to Italy. The strategic situation had changed as, thanks to the defeat of Axis forces in North Africa, the Poles were no longer needed to secure the Middle East oil fields. The Poles were hungry for revenge against the Germans, anywhere.

The new units were moved to Palestine where they linked up with the 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division. This unit was composed of small Free Polish units that had fought with the British in North Africa and joined by Poles who had fled Poland through Romania and Hungary. Besides ethnic Poles, Russian Jews, Belarusians, and Ukrainians joined the corps. In Palestine many of the Jews deserted the Polish forces to join the Haganah—deserters were not prosecuted. The corps then went to Egypt and arrived in Italy in July 1943 where it undertook additional training, acclimatization, and provided rear area security. The initial British proposal was to use the Poles as replacement units to relieve spent Commonwealth units. This was unacceptable to the Poles and the British command was persuaded to allow them to fight as a unified formation.

II Corps consisted of 42,000 troops organized into the 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division (13,200 men), 5th Kresowa Rifle Division (12,900 men), 2nd Armored Brigade (3,400 troops), II Corps Artillery Group, and corps support units. The two infantry divisions each possessed only two infantry brigades rather than the usual three, and would not receive their third brigades until 1945. In 1945 too the armored brigade was expanded to the 2nd Warsaw Armored Division.

II Polish Corps – Lieutenant-General Wladyslaw Anders

3rd Carpathian Rifle Division – Major-General Bronislaw Duch
1st Carpathian Rifle Brigade
    1st, 2nd, and 3rd Carpathian Rifle Battalions
2nd Carpathian Rifle Brigade
    4th, 5th, and 6th Carpathian Rifle Battalions
Division Artillery Group
    1st, 2nd, and 3rd Carpathian Field Regiments (25 pdr guns)
    3rd Carpathian Anti-Tank Regiment (17 pdr.)
    3rd Carpathian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (40mm)
12th Podolian Uhlan Regiment
3rd Carpathian Machine Gun Battalion
3rd Carpathian Sapper Battalion
3rd Carpathian Signals Battalion
Service units

5th Kresowa Infantry Division – Brigadier Nikodem Sulik
4th Wolynska Infantry Brigade
    10th, 11th, and 12th Wolyski Rifle Battalions
5th Wilenska Infantry Brigade
    13th, 14th, and 15th Wilenski Rifle Battalions
Division Artillery Group
    4th, 5th, and 6th Kresowa Field Regiments (25 pdr)
    5th Kresowa Anti-Tank Regiment (17 pdr)
    5th Kresowa Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (40mm)
5th Kresowa Machine Gun Battalion
5th Kresowa Sapper Battalion
5th Kresowa Signals Battalion
Service units

2nd Armoured Brigade – Brigadier Bronislaw Rakowski
4th Armoured Regiment
6th Armoured Regiment
1st Krechowiecki Uhlan Regiment
9th Field Troop [sappers]
Service units

II Corps Artillery Group – Brigadier Roman Odzierznski
9th Medium Regiment (4.5-in.)
10th Heavy Regiment (5.5-in.)
7th Horse Artillery Regiment
7th Anti-Tank Regiment (17 pdr.)
7th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (40mm)
8th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment (3.7-in.)

Independent Carpathian Uhlan Regiment [corps recce]
10th Sapper Battalion
11th Signals Battalion
1st Independent Commando Company
II Corps service units

Note: Units designated regiments were actually of battalion size.

The equipment and armament of the II Corps when it arrived in Italy consisted of:
660 artillery pieces, anti-tank guns, and anti-aircraft guns
170 light and medium tanks
180 reconnaissance and armored cars
400 universal carriers
5,300 trucks and lorries
2,000 special cars
1,300 light cars and jeeps
600 tractors and prime movers
80 armor transporters
2,500 motorcycles
500 2-in. and 3-in. mortars
950 Boys anti-tank rifles
100 Vickers machine guns
1,650 Bren guns
400 twin anti-aircraft Bren guns
22,000 Lee-Enfield rifles
17,000 Thompson submachine guns
4,000 Enfield revolvers

The Fourth Battle for Monte Cassino
Lieutenant-General Anders, the commander of II Polish Corps, was first alerted that his corps might be committed to take Monte Cassino on 24 March 1944, when the New Zealand attack was still underway, but losing momentum. He accepted the mission knowing it was possible that the corps could suffer the same fate as the previous attackers. On the other hand success would bring honor and retribution for the defeat of Poland in 1939. The Poles called it Operation Diadem (Coronet).

Planning began and a massive logistics buildup commenced for the spring offensive. The Polish Corps would attack from the northeast with the British XIII Corps attacking to the south up the Liri River Valley. Still further south the French Expeditionary Corps would attack into the Aurunci Mountains as II US Corps attacked along the coast.

The German defenders were mainly 1.Fallschirmjäger-Division, concentrated around Cassino town and Hill 593, while 5.Gebirgsjäger-Division defended the northern sector to Monte Cairo. The Germans made masterful use of the terrain for both fortifications and obstacles. The well dug-in positions were backed by portable steel pillboxes positioned in pre-dug holes, tank turrets mounted on buried concrete housings, and reinforced concrete bunkers and pillboxes. Caves and ravines provided additional protected positions and the heavy masonry construction of Italian buildings was utilized. The defenses were prepared in depth and any penetration ran into additional lines. The rubble caused by the massive aerial bombing and artillery barrages actually provided additional cover and obstacles. The rugged and battered terrain was reinforced by minefields,

flooding, and barbed wire. Machine guns, anti-tank guns, and mortars covered all tank and infantry approaches with interlocking fire from multiple directions. These weapons were backed by almost 300 German artillery pieces and Nebelwerfer multiple rocket launchers.

II Polish Corps' mission was to isolate Monastery Hill, overlooking Cassino town, by attacking from the north and northwest, to dominate Highway 6 to the south, and to link up with XIII British Corps. Then the Poles would take Monastery Hill.

More specifically, the 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division would seize the key Hill 593, then Hill 444, and then move on to Monastery Hill. The 5th Kresowa Division would attack from the south to seize Phantom Ridge, Colle Sant' Angelo and Hill 575, and then link up with XIII Corps to the south. The divisions each received a 2nd Armored Brigade Sherman tank regiment. The dismounted reconnaissance regiments would cover the divisions' flanks. Over 300 artillery pieces would provide fire support. A major camouflage effort was undertaken to mask the buildup and when the offensive was launched thousands of smoke pots would be used to screen the initial advances. Polish troops began to take over the forward positions in the sector from British troops on 15 April. All preparations were completed on 8 May. Zero hour, D-Day would be 2300 hours (11:00 pm), 11 May.

At the appointed time the combined artillery of the US Fifth and British Eighth Armies erupted, delivering a 40-minute barrage to neutralize German artillery and mortars. Then the artillery was shifted to German defensive positions and continued until midnight. One minute later the Polish infantry crossed its start lines. Even though sappers had managed to clear some gaps through the extensive minefields, the infantry advance was slow. The 5th Division battalions reached Phantom Ridge, but were pinned down by intense fire. One battalion reached Hill 517 beyond Phantom Ridge, but was forced to withdraw to the ridge. More troops arrived on the ridge and at dawn a German counterattack was repulsed. Enemy fire was so intense that casualties mounted rapidly and the battalions were ordered to withdraw from the ridge in the early afternoon.

In the north the 3rd Division had initial success in seizing several hill objectives, including the critical Hill 593. By dawn though they had suffered tremendous casualties and had beaten off as many as seven counterattacks. Other battalions were held up at the Gorge and never reached their objectives. Reluctantly, in the early evening the battered units were ordered to withdraw. Not only were tank and infantry losses high, but the sappers had suffered terribly attempting to breach minefields.

The XIII British Corps attack in the Liri Valley had made progress. The Germans appeared to be willing to give up ground there and to shift their fire to destroy the Poles, who were attacking the more critical terrain features. The great distance between the British and Polish corps allowed the Germans to fight two separate battles rather than one large one. Before the Polish Corps commenced a second attack, the British Corps would be given time to advance to a position where they could support the Poles. So much of the German artillery had been committed against the Poles that only a small portion was available for use against the British. While the Poles had been forced to withdraw and none of the initial objectives were secured, the attack did achieve some benefits for the second attack. Some enemy artillery positions were located and subjected to counter-battery fire, an entire reserve Fallschirmjäger battalion was wiped out moving into position, some minefield gaps were cleared, and German units defending the initial objectives were greatly reduced in strength, to the point where some would be unable to withstand another assault. The general German defensive layout had been revealed. The second attack, on 17 May, would essentially be a repeat of the first.

The artillery preparation began at 0600 hours (6:00 am) on the 17th with the 5th Division attacking Phantom Ridge and capitalizing on an earlier surprise attack by a battalion which had established a foothold on the ridge. The ridge was soon overrun and Colle Sant' Angelo was reached at 0710 hours, but a further advance was slowed by lines of pillboxes. German counterattacks were beaten back, but just barely and reserve units could not move up because of the artillery and mortar fire.

The 3rd Division's attack in the north was launched at the same time and cleared the Gorge at great cost. The attack was continued toward Mass Albaneta, but halted just short of the objective at nightfall. Hill 593 was repeatedly attacked, and the feature changed hands several times. Nevertheless, at the end of the day the hill remained in enemy hands. At dawn on the 18th the attack was renewed and the bitterly contested hill was finally taken at 1000 hours (10:00 am). A reconnaissance group of the 12th Podolian Uhlan Regiment raised the red and white Polish flag over the Monte Cassino Abbey. Mopping-up continued in all sectors. At 1600 hours (4:00 pm) contact was made with the British 76th Division two miles west of Cassino town and the British and Polish corps were now linked up. However, there were no Polish reserves or replacements left. Ad hoc companies had to be formed from the anti-tank regiment, headquarters defense company, drivers, etc. in order to retain the secured objectives. Hill 575 was seized on the night of 18/19 May. The town of Piedimonte to the west and Monte Cairo to the northwest were soon secured, but only after particularly bitter fights. The crumbling of the German defenses took pressure off the Allied forces bottled up at Anzio and they broke out on 25 May. The liberation of Rome occurred on 4 June 1944, about three weeks after Monte Cassino was secured and two days before the Normandy landing.

The II Polish Corps exhibited a particular valor and determination in an extremely vicious fight against a resolute enemy. They suffered almost 4,000 dead, wounded, and missing in action at Monte Cassino. The battle being fought in the spring saw the Monte Cassino hillsides covered with red poppies. It is said they owed their color to the blood of Polish soldiers.

Among these high-ranking Luftwaffe officers discussing the defense of the Monte Cassino sector on their future battlefield at the end of 1943 are Generalleutnant Richard Heidrich, commanding 1.Fallschirmjäger-Division (second from right), and Generalfeldmarschall Albrecht von Kesselring (center). Kesselring, Heidrich and other Luftwaffe commanders were familiar with ground operations owing to the earlier deployment of Luftwaffe units such as Fallschirmjäger divisions, Panzer-Division Hermann Göring, and Flak units, which often provided the core of German defense in central Italy.

Generalfeldmarschall Kesselring, in the foreground with his marshal's baton (Feldmarschallstab), departs a divisional headquarters with Generalleutnant Heidrich in March 1944, after the struggle for Monte Cassino had commenced. Heidrich wears the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross around his neck and the War Order of the German Cross on his right breast pocket. On his left pocket are the Iron Cross 1st Class with the eagle of the 1939 Clasp (indicating he had previously been awarded the "EK" or Iron Cross in World War I) black Wound Badge (indicating 1-3 wounds), and the Army Parachutist Badge. He was one of the original Army paratroopers and even though they were transferred to the Luftwaffe in 1938 they retained the Army badge. On his left cuff he wears the "Kreta" (Crete) arm stripe.

In late March 1944 Generalleutnant Heidrich (left) and Oberst Ludwig Heilmann (commanding Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 3) observe action in the Monte Cassino area from behind a stone street barricade. Heidrich was noted for wearing the 1943 field cap rather than the more formal officer's uniform cap (Schirmmütze). Note how rocks have been stacked behind iron balcony railing.

Another famous Luftwaffe commander in Italy, Feldmarschall Wolfram von Richthofen, commander of Luftflotte 2 (air fleet), during staff talks with officers of various units, summer 1944. They wear Luftwaffe tropical uniforms in sand color. The Army tropical uniform was of a light reed green color. Luftwaffe generals wore white collar tabs.

Oberst Heilmann poses in early 1944 in a blue helmet or "nutshell" (Nussschale), and sand-colored paratroop smock, which Fallschirmtruppen called the "bone-sack" (Knochensack). The smock was intended to be worn over individual equipment when jumping to prevent parachute suspension lines from snagging on it, but was retained for ground combat to serve as a waterproof camouflage jacket. The helmets were often painted sandcolor in Italy. He is armed with a 9mm Walther P.38 pistol in a black leather holster. Inside was a pocket for a spare eight-round magazine.

Fallschirm-Pioniertruppen erect a rubble roadblock on a bridge. Such obstacles might be mined or booby-trapped. As the Germans withdrew north at the end of 1943 they employed scorched earth tactics to slow down the Allied advance. They destroyed structures, roads, railroads, bridges, and culverts. The pioneer to the left wears a camouflage jump smock and green combat trousers while the man to the right wears the Luftwaffe blue field uniform. Being a light grayish blue, when dusty, it actually blended into the terrain at a distance. Both wear helmets painted sand color.

One of the first Fallschirmtruppe missions in Italy was to secure Rome in September 1943. This followed Italy's surrender to the Allies and the dissolution of Mussolini's government by military-royal opposition. Here a 4.2cm le.Pak 41 light anti-tank gun covers a street leading into one of the city's many squares. This scarce weapon fired a 4.2cm round which its Gerlich tapered bore "squeezed" down to 2.9cm resulting in a high-velocity round. The wire on the shield is for attaching foliage. The number "4" on a small colored square on the shield's left front probably indicates the gun's number within the platoon, which is identified by the color of the square.

This 8.8cm Flak 18 anti-aircraft gun is used for direct fire during a street battle in early 1944. The "acht-acht" (also called "Otto-Otto") with its high-velocity round was effective against buildings and tanks. It was seldom used for indirect fire as an artillery piece. It was less than ideal for such roles as it required time to emplace and displace, had a high profile that was difficult to conceal, and lacked a shield to protect the crew. Forward of and to the right of the gun are the Sd.Ah.202 transport carriages.

Fallschirmtruppe officers and NCOs observe the fall of artillery fire on the advancing Allies. They use the standard 6x30 binoculars. The NCO with a wristwatch is a Feldwebel.

Fallschirmjäger rush forward in a street fight with British troops in central Italy. In the background is a knocked out British Daimler Dingo Mk II armored recce car.

Fallschirmjäger cautiously prepare to advance down a broad cobblestone street. The two men lying on the stones would be better concealed if they had moved further forward to be completely in the building's shadow. The man to the left carries an Italian Beretta 9mm M38A submachine gun with a 40-round magazine. The Germans, who called this an MP.739(i) machine pistol, made fairly wide use of commandeered Italian weapons.

A Fallschirmjäger patrol wade a river beside a damaged bridge. They are avoiding crossing the bridge as it is probably under Allied observation and fire. Each is armed with a 9mm MP.40 machine pistol, often incorrectly called a "Schmeisser." Their stripped down equipment indicates that this is a short-range, short-duration reconnaissance patrol (Spähtrupp).

The remainder of the patrol cross the river. While not deep, it was hazardous to cross as the rounded stones were slippery and the rushing water fast. One miscalculated move and a man could be swept off his feet, resulting in a twisted ankle or an injured knee or elbow, in addition to the humorous derision of his comrades.

A Gefreiter crewman of a 2cm Flak 38 inserts a 20-round magazine into his gun. The white kill marks on the gunshield indicates that this weapon has downed five American aircraft. Besides its primary use as an anti-aircraft gun it was effective against troops and lightly armored vehicles.

Any means of transporting supplies was used in the rugged mountains to support the unending logistics effort. Here an Italian "burro" with civilian wicker baskets is employed. A burro could carry 100-150 lbs. as opposed to a man carrying 50 lbs. The four-footed animal was a lot more surefooted and complained less than a man.

A group of Fallschirmjäger in a defended building. The officer to the right wears a Waffen-SS camouflage smock while the man in the center follows a common practice of wearing a jacket made from Italian camouflage fabric. The man behind the officer wears a cloth helmet cover. These covers were usually green (as the helmets were originally blue), but this one appears to have been dabbed with paint for additional camouflage disruption. The lack of uniformity is notable and quite common. The two shoulder strap stripes of the man to the extreme left denote that he is an officer aspirant.

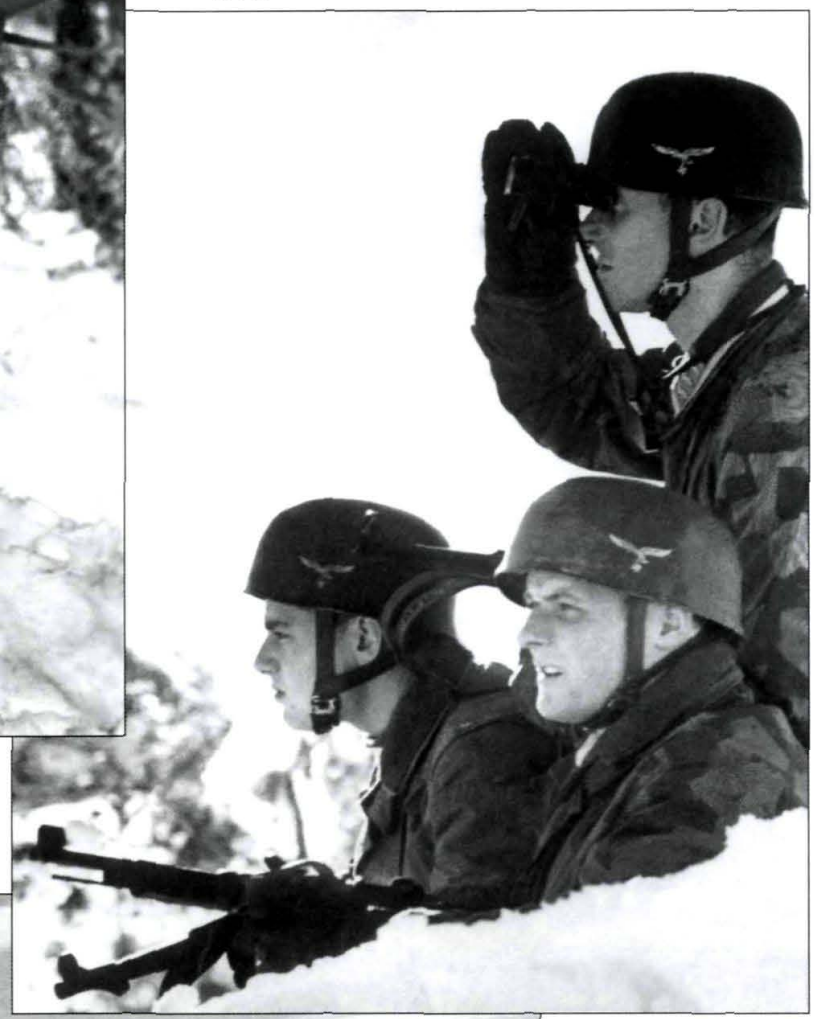
A machine gunner in a camouflage jump smock flips up the folding foresight on his 7.92mm MG 42 light machine gun. MG 42s were comparatively rare as most were sent to the Eastern Front. His position within the rubble of the building reduces his field of fire, but makes it more difficult to locate his position when he does open fire.

A Fallschirmjäger 7.92mm MG 34 heavy machine gun crew prepares to fire on a long-range target. Its recoil-absorbing tripod and optical sight allowed this weapon to engage targets at over 1,000 meters range. Though the MG 42 was cheaper and easier to produce and faster firing than the MG 34, it never fully replaced the older gun, which remained in production to the war's end. The clouds and fog give an idea of the difficulty of fighting in the mountains with limited visibility. Note that the gunner's helmet has been whitewashed.

The crew of a 5cm Pak38 anti-tank gun fire on Allied forces somewhere in the hills around Monte Cassino. The crewmen carry all their equipment and have their carbines slung across their backs in anticipation of having to manhandle the gun rapidly into another position. They would relocate after two or three rounds, more frequently if engaging tanks, in order to avoid counterfire in the form of machine guns, tank fire, mortars, or artillery. Note the vegetation attached to the gun shield.

A patrol trudges through thigh-deep snow, an exhausting task. The lead man, wearing a splinter-pattern camouflage jump smock, is armed with a Mauser 7.92mm Kar98k carbine, the standard shoulder weapon of the Wehrmacht. The circular metal disc on the side of the butt stock is to aid with bolt disassembly.

A patrol on a snowy mountainside scans the terrain ahead for signs of enemy movement. Two men wear splinter-pattern jump smocks. Snow camouflage suits were seldom if ever issued on the Southern Front owing to the serious need on the Eastern Front. The rifleman is armed with a Mauser 7.92mm Gew.33/40 "rifle." While designated a "rifle," it had a shorter barrel than the Kar98k carbine. This was a Czechoslovak-made vz.33 carbine used by the Fallschirmjäger and Gebirgsjäger.



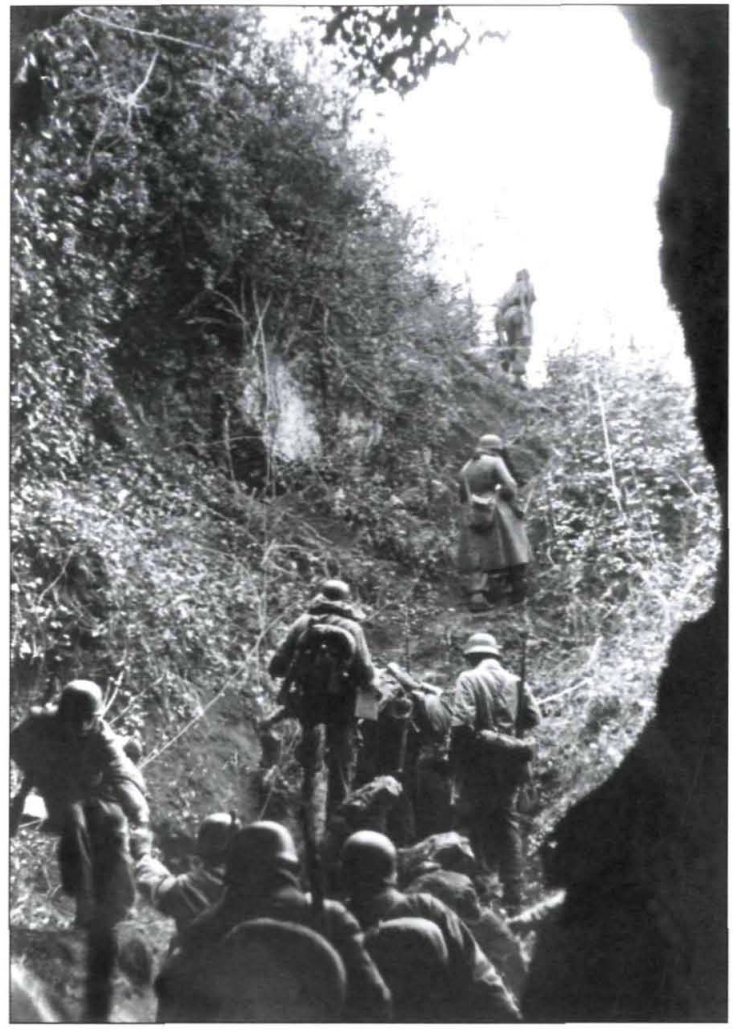
Knee-deep snow slows a patrol armed with a variety of weapons. The last man carries a battle rucksack. Each man was issued one of these, but this one was probably carried on patrol containing rations for a meal and perhaps some extra ammunition.

One Fallschirmjäger sports a colorful wool knit scarf . It was common practice for them to wear different colored cloth scarves in milder seasons. The collar piping on his blue flyer's blouse is gold-yellow as worn by both the Fallschirmjäger and Fliegertruppen (flying troops).

Snow was a problem not confined to the Eastern Front. Passengers of a Kübelwagen Typ 82 light car attempt to free it after bogging down in Italian snow. On the Southern Front the Germans seldom whitewashed vehicles in winter.

In the mountains mules were employed to deliver supplies to forward units. A sturdy pack mule could carry 200-250 pounds of ammunition, rations, supplies, and crew-served weapons components.

German military police troops were used for rear area security and anti-partisan operations. The Unteroffizier group (squad) leader is armed with a 9mm MP28/II machine pistol. It saw its first German service during the Spanish Civil War and was later relegated to police and second-line units. Virtually identical, formerly Belgian Mle. 34 submachine guns were also used by the Germans as the MP740(b).



A combat patrol (Gefechtsspähtrupp) emerges from one of the many grottos honeycombing the hills around Monte Cassino. The amount of equipment carried suggests that this will be a long patrol, perhaps remaining out overnight.

Fallschirmjäger amid the rubble of a destroyed town. The US Army Air Forces heavily bombed all the towns in the Monte Cassino area.

Shabby and dirty after long manning their hillside strongpoint this group of Fallschirmjäger share bread for their lunch in the entrance to their dugout. The Obergefreiter in the foreground has cut slits in his helmet cover through which to keep his chin straps out of the way. The man to the left wears a civilian sweater.

From their fighting trench, Fallschirmjäger watch action on a neighboring ridge. One man has a crudely fashioned cloth helmet cover secured by a leather strap, while another has a camouflage net on his helmet.

This scene appears to be the arrival of a relief group at a forward strongpoint. The man to the left wears a beard and mangy haircut, indicating that his group has long occupied the position. The water bottle he is passing back probably contains wine, as this was a common practice and water in the area was often undrinkable.

Troops manning a frontline trench. Note the shelter-quarter protected niche with stacked machine gun ammunition cans. There appears to be a small firing embrasure in the parapet before the seated man. He wears an issue helmet cover with cloth loops for attaching foliage. The man in the rear wears the M35 steel helmet as issued to ground troops. It was common for replacements to be equipped with this helmet.

A radio post with a Torn.Fu. radio receiver/transmitter. The Tornister Funkgerat (backpack radio equipment) was the most common radio set used by tactical units. There were several models identified by a letter or letter/number appended, such as the Torn.Fu. b1, d2, f, or k. These covered different frequency ranges. The Torn.Fu.d2 was used for communications between the infantry regiment and its battalions and companies. The Torn.Fu.k was used by artillery forward observers.

A wounded soldier is transported by litter down a mountainside accompanied by a Sanitäter (medical aidman). Sanitätspersonal were known by several other nicknames, including "Sani", "Sanitäts", and "Sanitöter", the last being a play on words combining Sanitäter (medical orderly) and Töter (killer).

MG 42 machine guns in the heavy machinegun role, that is, mounted on a Lafette 42 tripod and fitted with a 4x Zf.40 4x optical sight. The six-man crew also carried three or four spare barrels while a two-man light machine gun crew only carried one.

An MG 42 light machine gun crew lays concealed in its position. The camouflaging cut vegetation is beginning to wilt. Enemy observers would scan terrain closely with binoculars looking for wilting foliage. The MG 42 had a rate of fire of 1,100-1,200 rounds per minute. The MG 34 fired at 800-900 rpm. The British water-cooled Vickers .303-in. Mk 1 medium machine gun fired at 450-550 rpm and the Bren .303-in. light machine gun at 500 rpm. Both of these armed the Poles fighting for Monte Cassino.

An Italian unit moves to the front in their gray-green uniforms and armed with Mannlicher-Carcano 6.5mm rifles. Italian units had minimal participation in the Monte Cassino battle. Those present were mainly used for rear area and line-of-communications security, covering exposed flanks, and hauling supplies forward. Some small units were sent forward to reinforce German units.

Appearing like a staged anti-Nazi propaganda photograph these Waffen-SS officers urge Italian troops onward as they push a truck up a hill. Italian units attached to German units frequently found themselves relegated to logistics support man-packing supplies and maintaining supply routes.

A Luftwaffe-manned 2cm Flakvierling 38 quad light anti-aircraft gun. The major flaw of this and other German 20mm guns was that changing the 20-round magazines required a pause in firing. Ammunition included high-explosive, high-explosive-tracer, armor-piercing, armor-piercing-tracer, and armor-piercing 40 (with a tungsten steel core).

Gunners prepare what appears to be a 15cm artillery projectile for an unidentified artillery piece, possibly Italian.

Owing to the static nature of much of the fighting the Germans were able to employ heavy siege guns. Here a 21cm Mrs.18 heavy mortar blasts a 267-lb. (121-kg) projectile toward Allied lines. The mortar's large recoil cylinder is protected by a retrofitted wooden plank shield. This weapon had a range of 18,270 yards (16,700m).

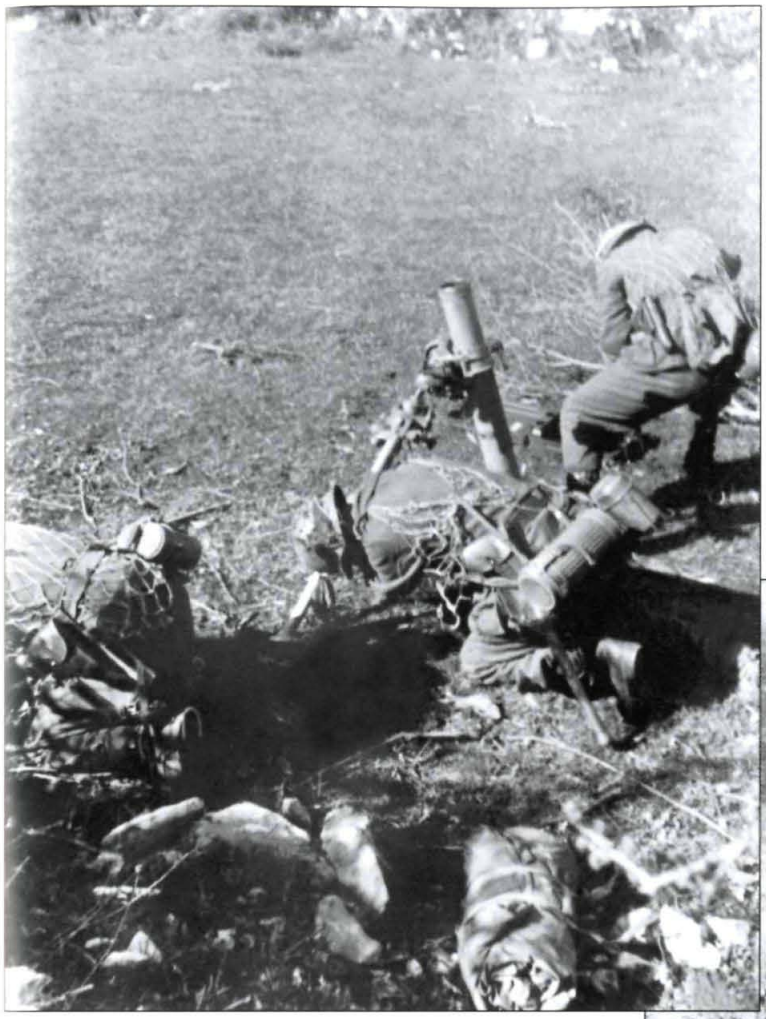
A limbered 10.5cm le.FH.18 light field howitzer and its ammunition caisson are hauled forward by a team of six horses. The diverse sizes of the horses show that remount stations were providing whatever horses were available amidst a growing shortage. A large artillery piece, probably battle-damaged, is being hauled to the rear for repair. The 10.5cm field howitzer was the standard German divisional artillery piece, not the "88mm" as is often implied.

An artillery forward observer searches for targets using 6x30 Sf.14Z scissors binoculars (Scherenfernrohr); called "donkey ears" (Eselsohren) by German troops. The add-on long tubes, intended to eliminate lens reflections, are further camouflaged with tan burlap. Each artillery battery established a forward observation post. The observer is wearing a reversible anorak in two colors, field gray and white. These windproof jackets were widely issued in Italy.

Observation posts were linked to the battery and battalion command post by a Torn.Fu.k radio. If a target warranted more attention than could be inflicted by a single battery, the artillery battalion's other batteries would be directed on the target and the fire adjusted by the OP. The right half of the radio case contains the transmitter and the left side the receiver. The accessory and battery box is sitting to the left of the radio. One Gefreiter operates the radio and the other records messages. The foreground Funker (radioman) wears a Nachrichtenpersonal (signals personnel) badge above his Gefreiter chevron. It has a dark green oval backing with a point-down red lightning bolt; red indicating he is a member of an artillery unit.

The crew of an 8cm m.Gr.W.34 mortar readies for firing. While designated 8cm, it is actually 81mm and could fire US and French 81mm ammunition and British 3-inch mortar rounds (which were actually 81mm and not 76mm as is often assumed). The man in the left foreground has a tubular metal carrier pack frame (Traggestell 39) on his back. This was used to carry ammunition containers and weapon accessories. The mortar is painted dark yellow and has a black strip painted down the tube as an alternative line-of-sight aiming system. On field gray-painted tubes this stripe was white.

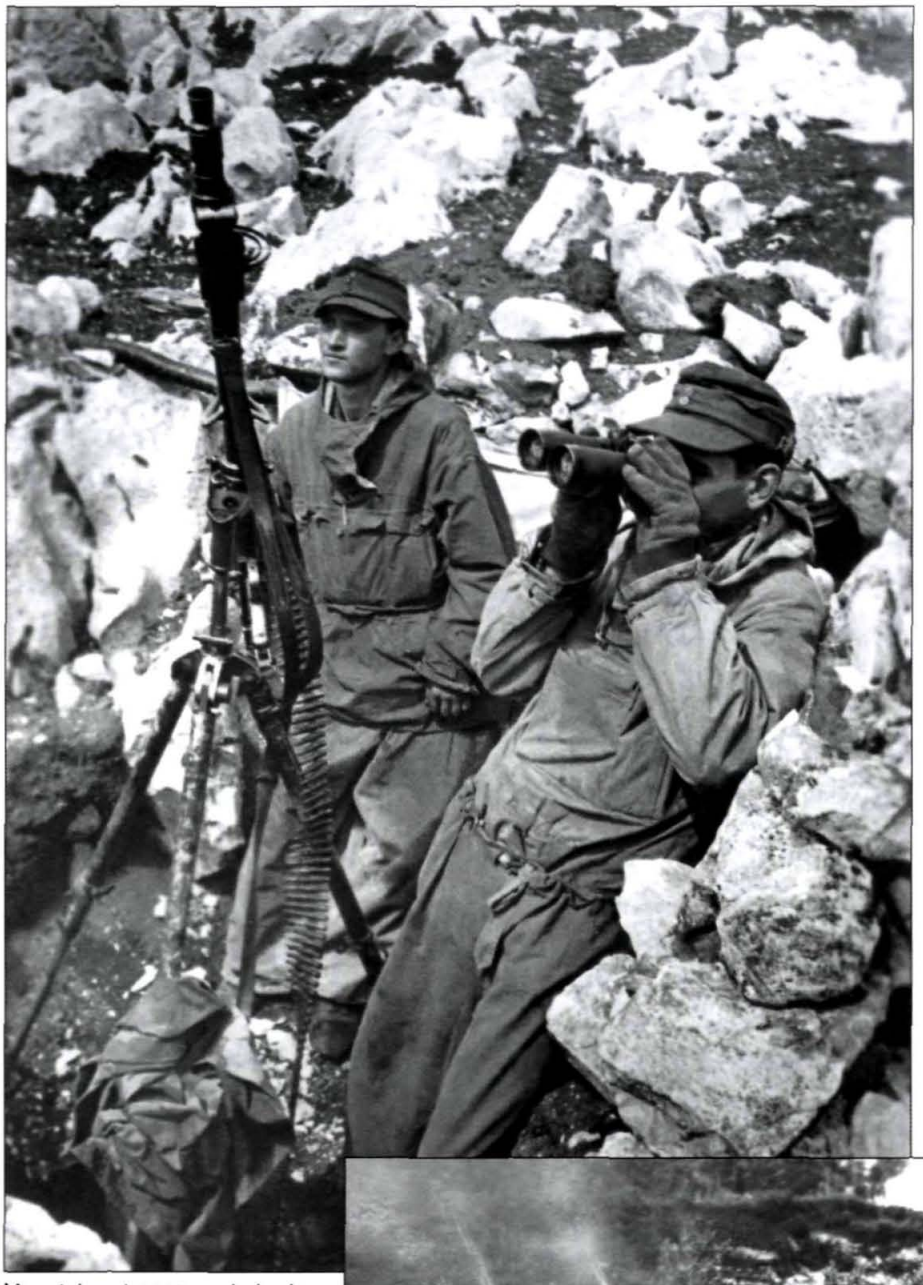
After the Italian surrender of September 1943 the Germans confiscated weapons from Italian units, and took over many armories and weapons depots. Most of the Italian equipment was obsolescent or even obsolete. However, sufficient ammunition was available and the weapons were often used to reinforce defensive positions. The Italian equipment was valuable too because the Germans in Italy were losing much equipment in their defensive battles and subsequent retreats. Replacements from Germany were scarce, with much of the production going to the Eastern Front. This is a 65mm 65/17 mountain gun, which were withdrawn from alpine units and employed as an infantry support gun. It was provided with an ineffective antitank round. The Germans used it as the 6.5cm Geb.K.246(i).



An 8cm mortar crew fires its weapon. The infantry battalion's machine gun company had a platoon of six of these mortars. Originally the 8cm was rated as a heavy mortar, but with the adoption of the 120mm s.Gr.W.43 in 1943 (direct copy of a Soviet weapon), the 8cm was reclassified as a medium mortar. Mortars played an important role in the mountains as they were able to drop rounds behind steep ridges and into ravines. Note that the crew wears camouflage nets.

This crew of a 5cm le.Gr.W.36 mortar fires their compact, but heavy weapon from a protected position. The entry to their dugout is to the upper right. This little mortar was expensive and slow to produce, complex to operate, and its explosive charge no more effective than a hand grenade. One was assigned to each rifle platoon. They were withdrawn in 1943, but some units retained theirs. The metal ammunition box contained 10 maroon-painted rounds.

A Fallschirmjäger MG 42 machine gun covers a destroyed town from behind sandbags riddled with shell fragments. Several machine guns would cover such approaches with overlapping sectors of fire from different directions. Even if one or two nests were knocked out, other guns still covered the sector.



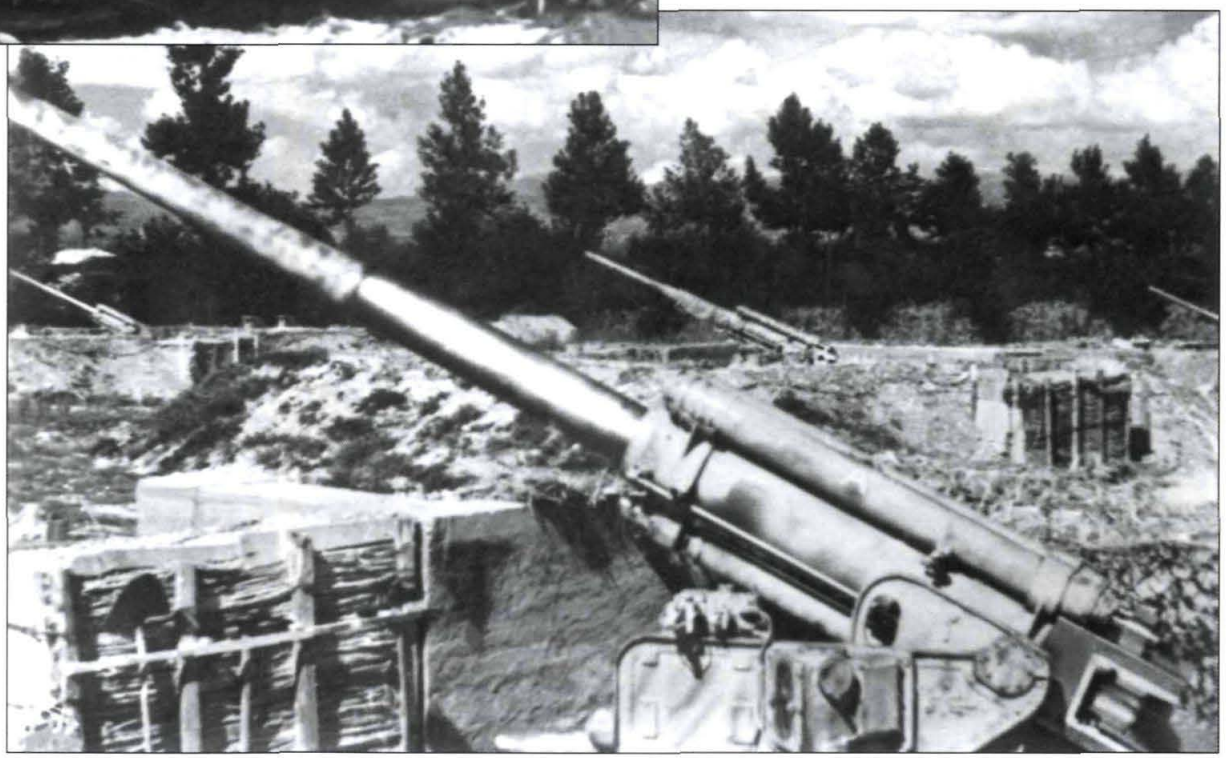
Mountain troops, clad in anoraks, man an MG 34 on a Dreifuss 34 anti-aircraft tripod. The gun is fitted with an anti-aircraft ring sight. Such positions were prepared to the rear of frontline and often placed on reserve slopes to surprise attacking aircraft as they flew over the crest of hills and ridges. The gun could also engage ground targets, but the mounting was a little unstable when firing horizontally.

The crew of an 8.8cm Flak18 anti-aircraft gun readies its massive weapon for action. The planks fastened above the barrel protect the hydraulic recoil cylinder. Being mounted high on the weapon exposed it to fragmentation, even within a dug-in position. Most 88s were operated by the Luftwaffe.

A 2cm Flakvierling 38 quad light anti-aircraft gun engages an Allied aircraft. With all four barrels firing it achieved a combined rate of 1,800 rpm. Its effective slant range was 2,200 meters. A platoon consisted of three guns emplaced in a "V" formation with the point of the "V" aiming at the expected enemy air approach.

When employed in rear areas for anti-aircraft defense 8.8cm guns were emplaced in prepared positions of planks, logs, timber, brick, and/or light concrete (Verstärkter Feldmässiger Ausbau). Note that the rear portion of the barrel of this Flak18 just forward of the cradle is unpainted: the paint was worn off by recoil. 8.8cm guns were emplaced in battery positions of four guns, usually in a square or diamond layout.

This gun crew engages enemy bombers. They are inserting the rounds nose first in the automatic fuse-setter, which is connected by a cable to the battery fire control center. The altitude of the enemy aircraft was determined by optical rangefinders and transmitted to the guns enabling the fuse to be set for the necessary delay time.



Trucks and horses were not used to emplace guns close to the frontline, so as to protect them from enemy fire. Here the crew of a 5cm Pak 38 anti-tank gun manhandle the gun up to a position covering a hillside road. The Pak 38 was intended to replace the impotent 3.7cm Pak 35/36, but the latter remained in use.

The crew of a 10.5cm le.FH.18M unlock the trails to emplace it for direct fire within a town. The "M" refers to the muzzle break which was added in 1941 and allowed a heavier charge to be fired to increase the range. In built-up areas field artillery was commonly employed to blast defenders out of fortified buildings with direct fire. This was especially valuable in Italy, where buildings were of heavily stone construction.

This German ambulance was caught in an Allied bombardment. Note the partial red cross insignia on white discs over the cab and an unidentified unit insignia on the ambulance's right fender.

Jäger, 1.Fallschirmjäger-Division, Monte Cassino, May 1944

Fallschirmtruppen were issued a variety of uniform components of different colors. These were commonly worn mixed with little consistency. This Jäger (private) wears the paratrooper's blouse (Fallschirmjägerbluse), a waterproof protective jacket known to paratroopers as the Knochensack (bone-sack). These jackets were commonly issued in gray-green, tan (for tropical areas), and two camouflage patterns, "splinter" and "splotched" (aka "water"). All of these were found in Italy and often mixed within units. It is worn over the blue-gray Fliegerbluse (flyer's jacket). The Waffenfarbe of the Fallschirmtruppen was gold-yellow, the same as for flying troops. The gray-green loose-fitting over-trousers are worn over the blue-gray flyer's trousers as a means of camouflage and additional weather protection. They were also made in sand-color. The dome-like paratrooper's steel helmet (Fallschirmhelm), known as a Nussschale (nutshell), was similarly issued in a variety of colors: gray-green, blue-gray, and sand. Cloth helmet covers were also used in green, sand, tan, and camouflage fabric. The lace-up paratrooper's boots proved to be useful footwear in Italian mountains. Slung over his neck is the eight-pocket bandoleer for 20-round magazines for the 7.92mm FG 42 Fallschirmjägergewehr automatic rifle. These were made in gray-green, sand, and camouflage colors. It was originally envisioned that the FG 42 would replace the bolt-action carbine and the MG 34 machine gun in Fallschirmjäger units. Only 6,000 were produced, in two versions. They were unevenly distributed with two to four per platoon.

Gefreiter, Luftwaffe Flak unit, Monte Cassino, May 1944

This member of an 8.8cm Flak crew wears the standard blue-gray wool uniform tunic, a hot garment for the Italian summer. Nights in the mountains were cold though, so it had its uses. The collar, closed here, was also designed to be worn open. The red Waffenfarbe of the Flaktruppen is displayed on his rank shoulder straps, collar tabs, and collar edging. The two silver wings on his collar tabs indicate his rank as Gefreiter, but he would also wear a silver point-down chevron centered on his upper left sleeve. Loose-fitting tropical sand-colored trousers complete the ensemble. The helmet is the standard M34, painted sand-color. He is armed with a 7.9mm Gew.98 rifle, an obsolescent weapon, but many of them were issued to non-infantry units through the war. He has a Stg.24 stick hand grenade stuck in his belt behind the three-pocket leather cartridge pouches. Each pocket held two five-round charger clips.

Oberjäger, 5.Gebirgs-Division, Monte Cassino, May 1944

"Oberjäger" was the traditional rank title for an Unteroffizer (corporal) of Gebirgsjäger units. Rifle group (squad) leaders held the Oberjäger/Unteroffizer rank. In infantry units a private was designated a "Grenadier" and a senior private an "Obergrenadier". In Gebirgsjäger units they were designated "Jäger" and "Oberschütze" (senior rifleman) respectively, since "Oberjäger" was used instead of "Unteroffizier". Group leaders were typically armed with a 9mm MP 40 machine pistol and provided with two three-pocket magazine pouches for the 32-round magazines of the Kugelspritz (bullet-squirter). He is outfitted in the traditional Bergmütze mountain cap with the metal Gebirgsjäger badge on the left side, light camouflage jacket (leichte Tarnjacke), heavy weight loose-fitting mountain trousers, and climbing boots with puttees. One side of the camouflage jacket was a three-color camouflage pattern and the other was white. Neither rank insignia nor the cloth mountain troops' badge (usually worn on the upper left sleeve) were worn on the camouflage jacket.

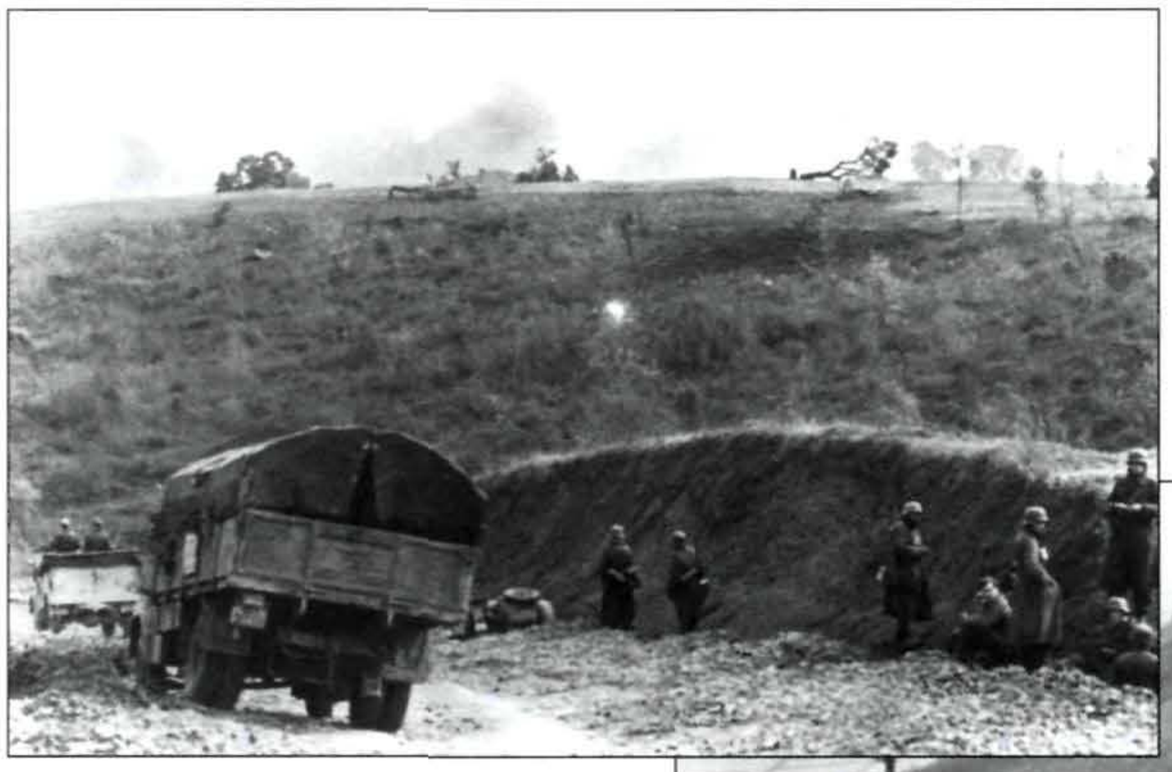
Sierżant, 3 Dywizja Strzelców Karpackich, Monte Cassino, May 1944

This sergeant of the Polish 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division displays *a captured German national flag and has armed himself with a* Lee-Enfield .303-inch No. 4 Mk 1 rifle. The Poles were uniformed by the British and appeared no different except for rank and unit insignia, the Poland nationality flash, and the Polish armed forces eagle on the front of the Mk 1 helmet. The division formation sign and the nationality flash were worn on both shoulders. Both insignia incorporated the Polish national colors. The khaki (actually a medium brown) battle-dress, a wool knit sweater, and ankle boots (aka "ammunition boots"), and web anklets comprised the basic uniform.

Infantrymen move to the front. Few bridges in the region survived the battle, being destroyed by both the Germans and Allies. A downed bridge may halt vehicle traffic, but seldom troops on foot.

A sand-colored Volkswagen Kübelwagen is floated across a small river aboard a ferry constructed from two 18-foot medium pneumatic boats and a wooden bridge section. Such a raft could carry a 2.25-ton load. The raft is lightly camouflaged with vegetation allowing it to be pulled up beneath shoreline trees for concealment if Allied aircraft approached.

7.5cm rounds are passed from an ammunition truck to a StuG. 40 assault gun, called a ""Stug" or "Saukopf" (sow's head) owing to the streamlined gun mantlet. Assault guns were excellent mobile weapons, even though they were more often dug-in and concealed to ambush Allied tanks. With only narrow avenues of approach available in most areas the lack of a fully rotating turret was rarely a hindrance. They possessed heavy frontal armor and their low profile made them easy to conceal in rugged terrain and within ruined buildings.



A motorized column passes resting troops behind the front. There was so much Allied air activity over the region that even in the rear troops kept close to cover. Trees were sparse in the area and those on the ridge were probably cut down for use in bunkers.

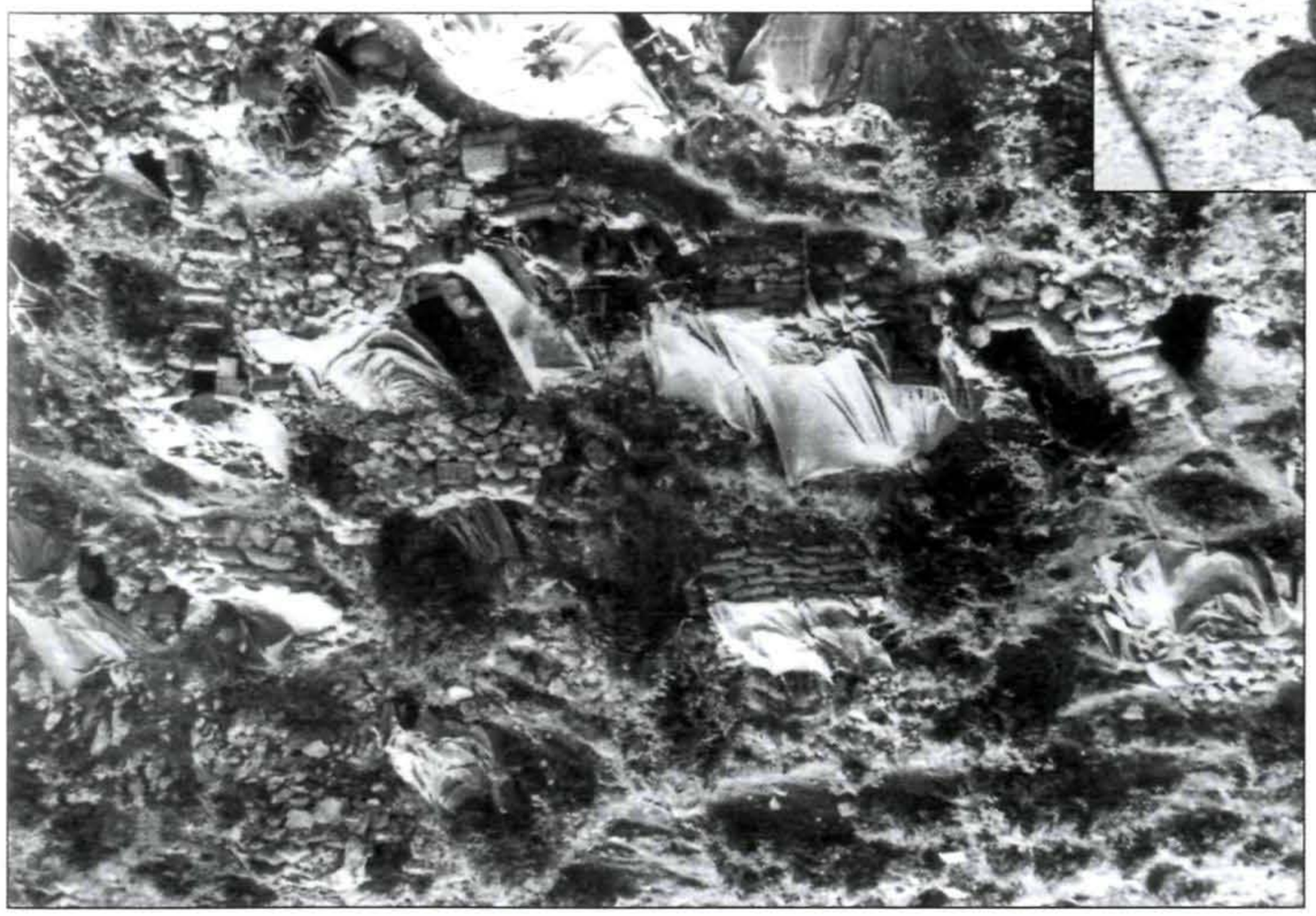
Brand new dark yellow-painted Sd.Kfz.250/1 infantry carrier halftracks arrive from Germany via the Brenner Pass, probably for 16.SS-Panzergrenadier-Division "Reichsführer-SS". This formation arrived in Italy in May 1944 to help oppose the Allied offensive. These are late production models with the side stowage compartments built into the troop compartment rather than separate boxes fitted over the track guards.

The Poles—Infantry (Piechoty)

The commander of Polish 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division (3 Dywizja Strzelców Karpackich), Major-General Bronislaw Duch addressing his troops prior to battle. The division was heavy involved at Cassino. Note the division's insignia (green tree on white and red background) on the left fender of the Mk 1 Universal Carrier. Better known as a Bren gun carrier, this particular vehicle is armed with a .303-in. Bren gun behind the general. A PIAT Mk 1 Projector, Infantry, Anti-Tank is mounted in the port below and to the right of the general.

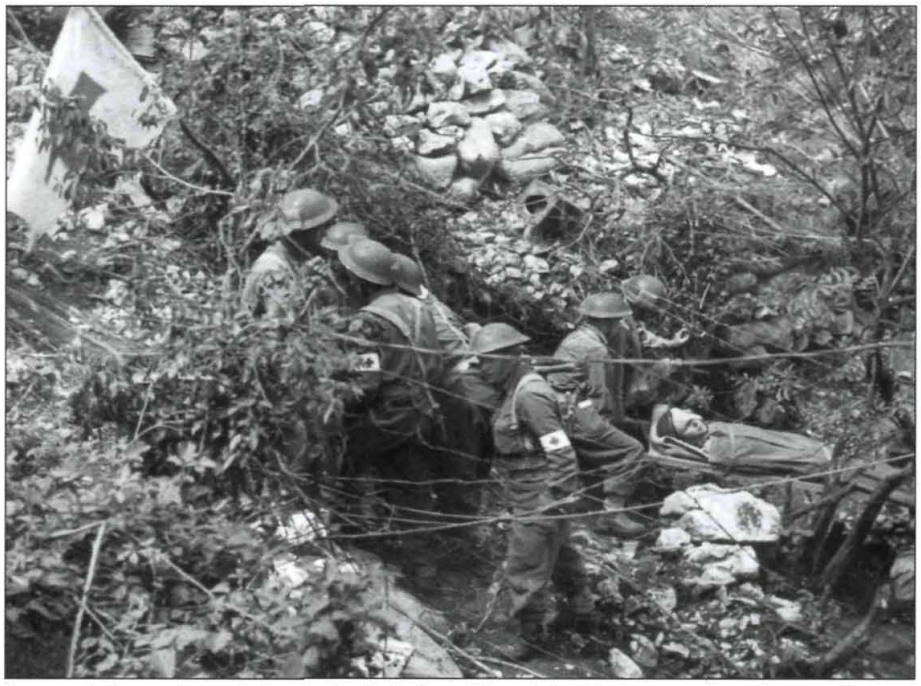
Polish infantrymen practice throwing No. 36M Mills bombs in pre-battle combat training. One is armed with a US-made .45-cal. M1928A1 submachine gun and the other with a Lee-Enfield .303-in. rifle. Free Polish forces in the west were armed, equipped, uniformed, and supplied by the British. Some US-made weapons were used by the Poles, as they were by the British. Other than unit and rank insignia, the Polish uniform was indistinguishable from the British.

The rugged terrain made astounding demands of the troops. Here the components of a 17-pounder (3-inch) anti-tank gun are hauled up San Onofrio. One would think there would be little need for such a heavy anti-tank weapon in such rugged country, but they were used to knock out enemy positions on facing hills and ridges at long ranges to support infantry attacks.



The reverse slopes of defended hills and ridges were honeycombed with dugouts sheltering quarters, command posts, signals posts, supply dumps, aid posts and kitchens. They were reinforced by rocks, sandbags, and scarce wood. For protection from rain they were covered by blocks of sod and with canvas tarps. These are the dugouts of the 12th Podolian Uhlan Regiment on d'Onofrio Hill. This was the 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division's reconnaissance unit.

A 3-inch Mk 2 mortar is fired from its pit. The difficulty of digging such a position in the rocks can be well imagined. The small stakes are for aligning the mortar with pre-selected targets. The small cards provided the target designation, elevation, and firing charge. The British 3-inch mortar is not 76mm as is so often reported. It is actually 81mm (3.2 inches). In the foreground can be seen mortar bomb tubes with integral web carrying handles. The infantry battalion's support company had a platoon of six of these mortars.



A wounded man is carried out of a battalion aid post for his journey down to an advanced dressing station or main dressing station. Red Cross flags and armbands identified medical facilities and personnel. The Germans generally honored the Geneva Convention symbol. Note the large number of field telephone lines strung over the dugout. The rear areas were criss-crossed with these.

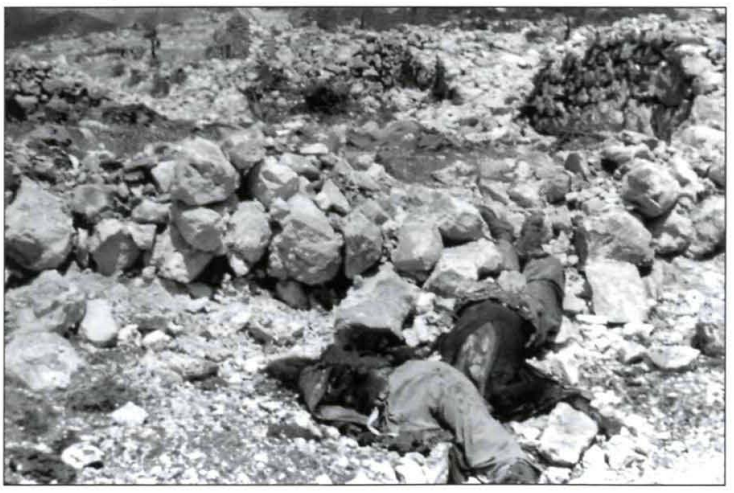
American 1/4-ton jeeps served as frontline ambulances and were able to get into areas inaccessible to larger ambulances. A jeep ambulance could carry two litter patients with the aid of a folding rack on the rear to support the litters' protruding ends. Two more litters could be carried crosswise on the hood. A canvas slip-on cover prevents the folded windshield from casting revealing reflections. Note that white cloth engineer tape marks the road's edge and a steep drop-off.

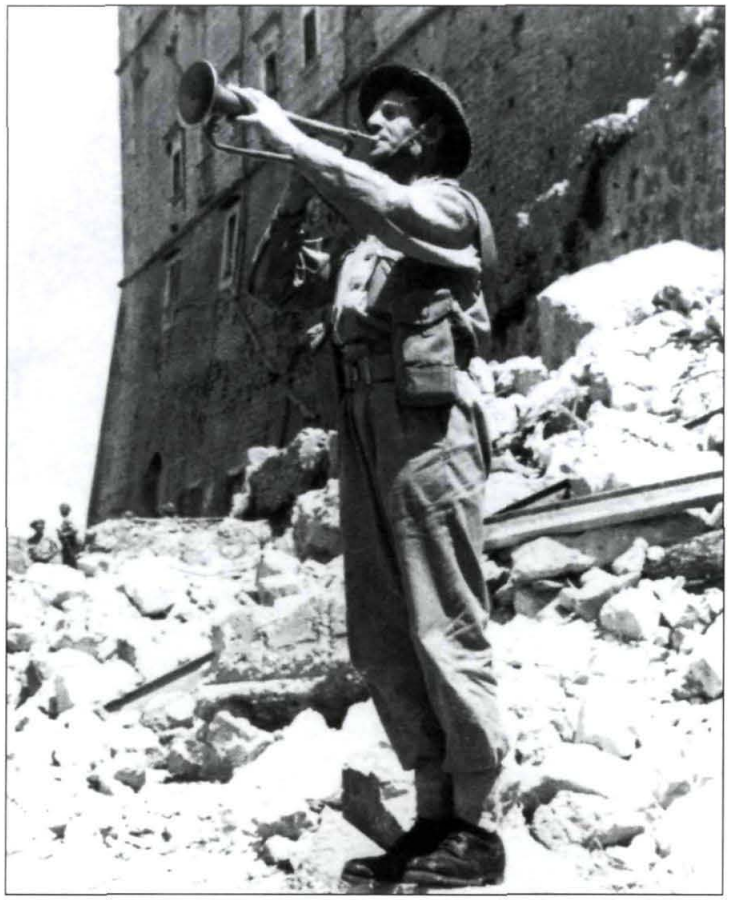
Recovery details accompanied by medics search for, identify, and recover the dead, here on Hill 593. They also recovered weapons and ammunition, which the Germans would not hesitate to pick up and use.

The cost of an attack on a German position. The engineer tape strung along the track marks a cleared gap through a German minefield.

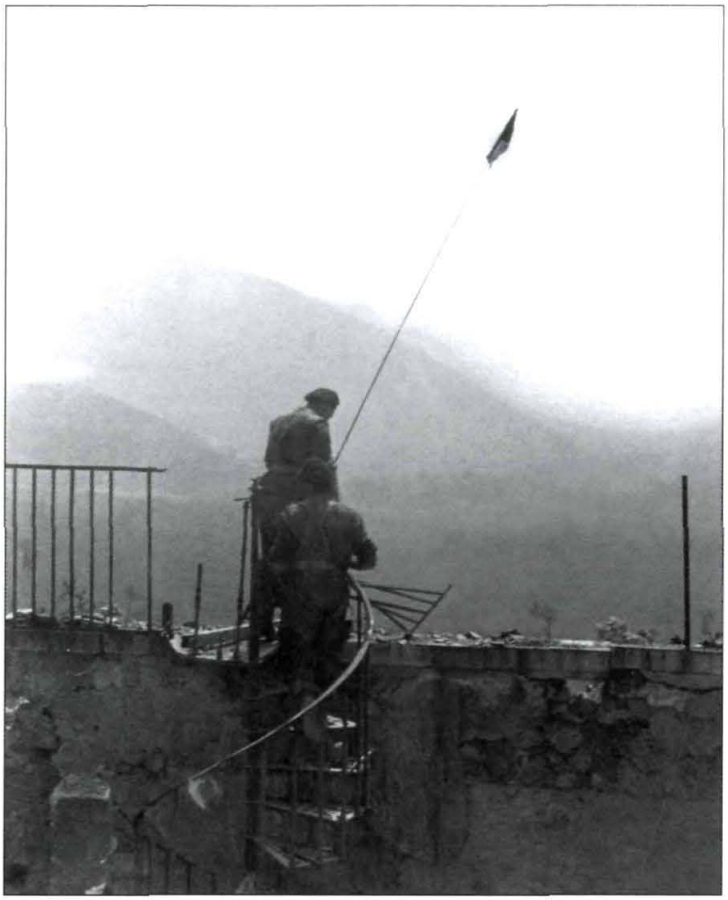
Polish dead who were cut down by mortar or artillery fire while vainly seeking cover among rock walls. On such terrain rock fragments were just as deadly as shell fragments.

Polish troops take a break at a command post on a reverse slope. One is armed with a captured 9mm MP40 machine pistol. Behind him is the most common type of hasty field fortification used in Italy, a "sangar." In many areas the ground was too hard or rocky to dig in. Rocks were plentiful though and simply staged in low circular shelters. They might be roofed over with logs or salvaged planks and then topped with rocks.

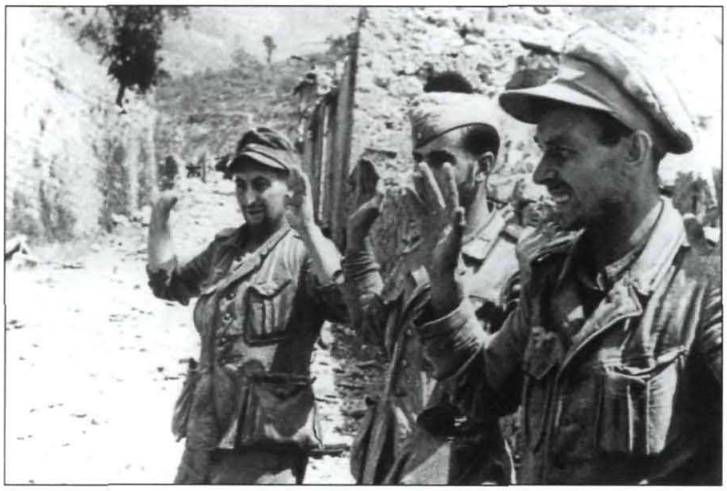




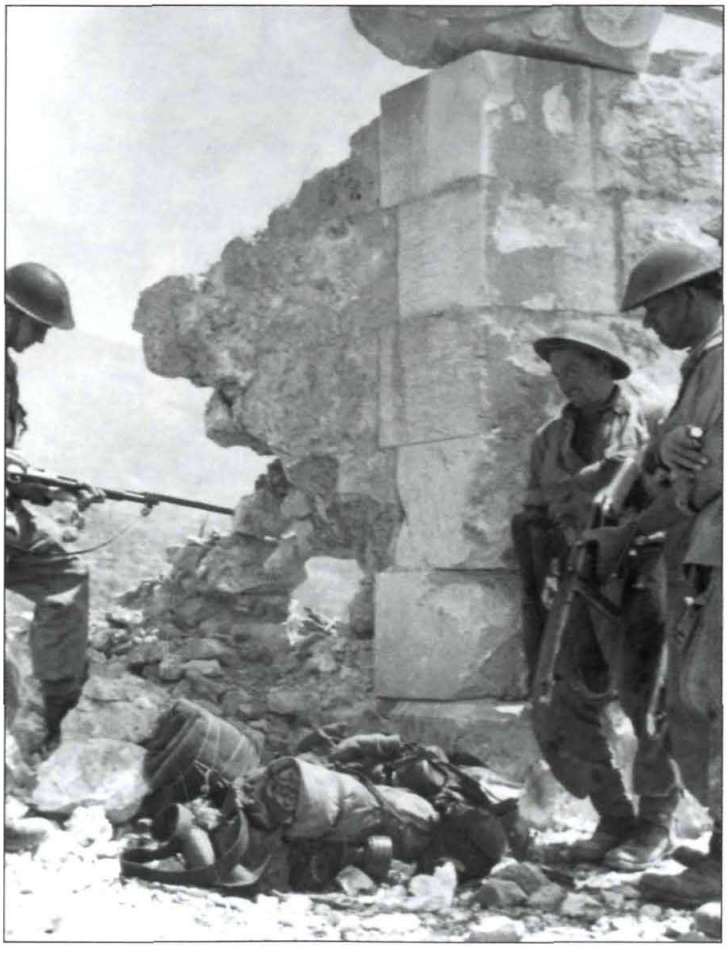
A bugler from the 3rd Sapper Battalion (3 Saperow Batilion) of the 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division playing the Hymn of Kraków on taking over the ruins of Monte Cassino monastery. He wears the standard khaki (medium brown) British battle dress and Mk 1 helmet.



Infantrymen raise a red and white lance pennon over the ruins of Piedimonte on 25 May 1944, a step towards the final conquest of Monte Cassino. Piedimonte was a key German stronghold and the site of a vicious battle about six miles to the southwest of Monte Cassino.



Luftwaffe troops, accompanied by an officer, surrender to Polish troops. These may be deserters. They wear sand-color tropical uniforms and all three forms of tropical field caps are displayed. The officer in the foreground wears the infamous, but little worn, tropical peaked cap (Tropenschirmmütze) known as the "Hermann Meier cap" (Hermann Meiermütze), so named because of Göring's misplaced early war boast that enemy bombers would never pass the Ruhr River and if they did, "...you can call me Meier". Beyond him are the visorless and peaked tropical field caps.



Polish infantrymen examine equipment dropped by surrendering Germans, perhaps worried that it may have been booby-trapped. The man to the left carries an unidentified 12-gauge long-barrel, pump-action shotgun.

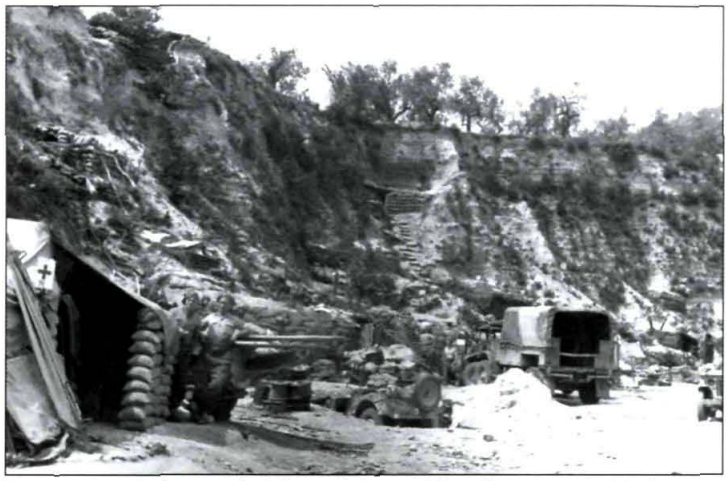
A German soldier caught by an artillery barrage. Beside him lies his splintered Kar98k carbine.

Polish infantrymen and tank crewmen resting after taking Piedimonte. After six days of vicious fighting the ruins were abandoned by Germans, and the Poles marched in unopposed.

Two Polish soldiers search a Luftwaffe Unteroffizer. Note the green pine tree insignia on a white and red shield, the 3rd Carpathian Rifle Division's badge, on the soldier to the right. His rank is sergeant major (mlodszy chorazy), silver-colored edge braid, point-down chevron, and star. In the background kneels another prisoner wearing an anorak.

Obviously exhausted and battered prisoners from Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 100 still bearing their surrender flag. The Germans believed that the bitter Poles would not take prisoners and this appeared to reinforce their resolve in the defense.

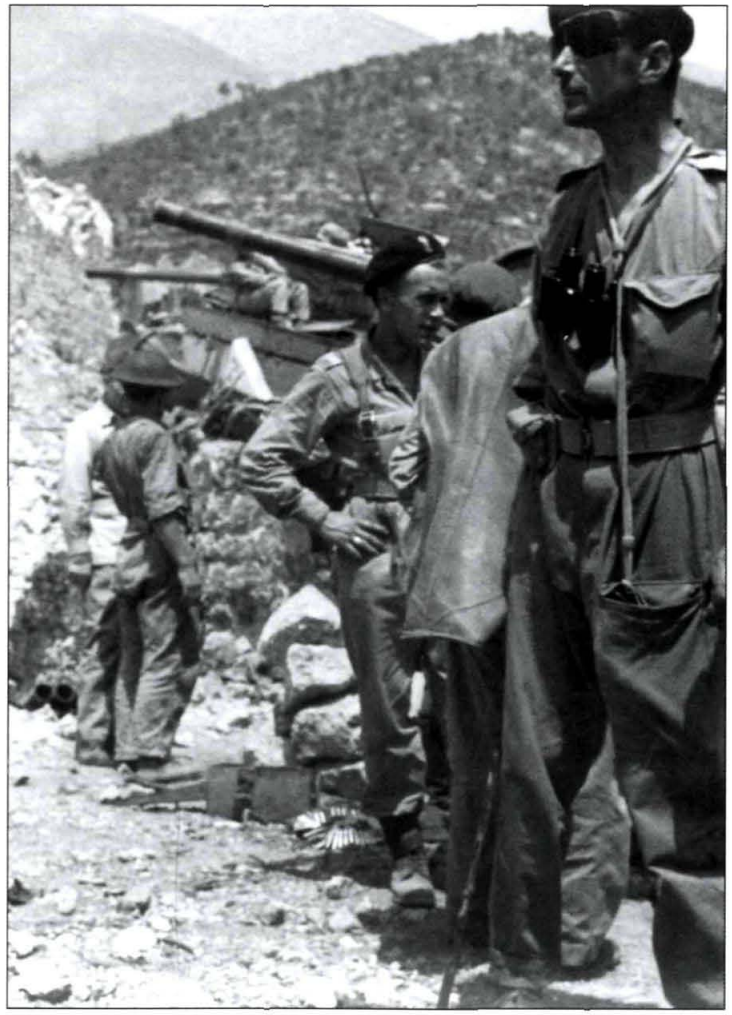
The Poles—Armor (Pancerna)



Motorized unit's leaguer in Inferno Valley with its side covered with dugouts. The single flimsy wall of sandbags to the left would collapse from the detonation of a nearby 8cm mortar round, much less an artillery round detonation. Jeeps and a light Bedford 15 cwt. truck can be seen.

A sand-painted Sherman III tank of the 4th Armored Regiment (4 Pancerna Putk), 2nd Armored Brigade (2 Bryguda Pancerna). On the side of the turret can be faintly seen the rectangular insignia of 2nd Squadron (2 Szwadron). Beside the 75mm M3 main gun is a coaxial .30-cal. M1919A4 machine gun and another in the bow. Track guard racks have been added to hold sandbags and old-type track links are fastened to the front glacis for additional protection. "Sherman III" was the British designation for the American-made M4A2.

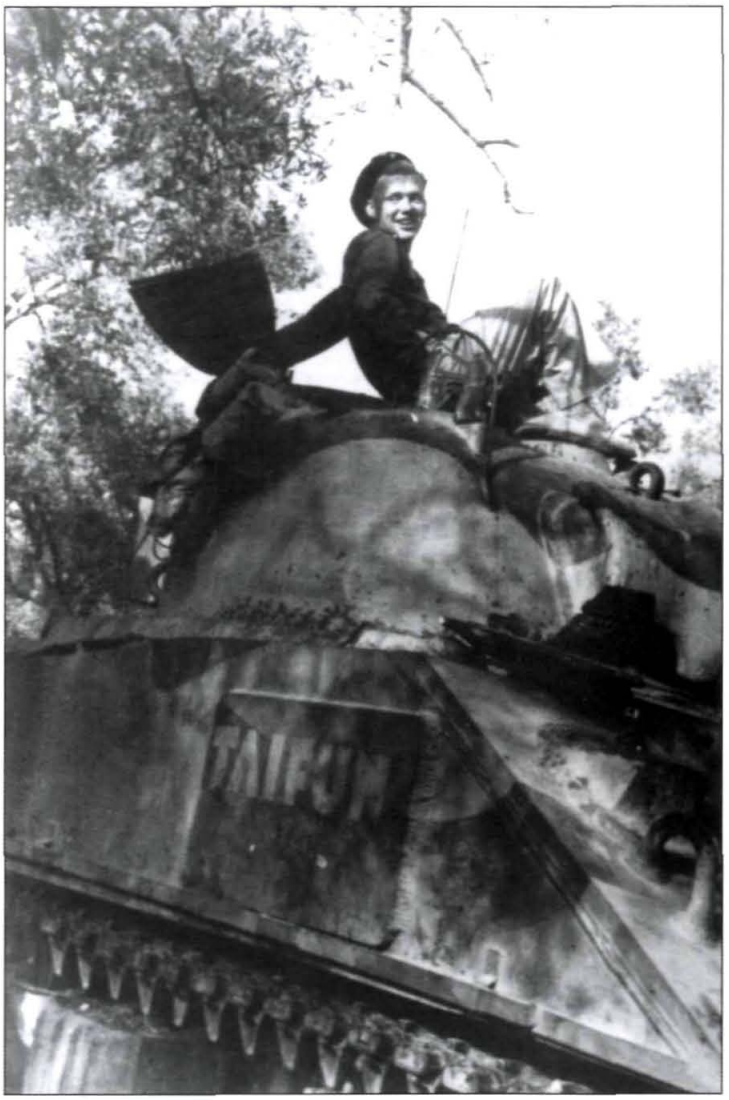
A crew "ammos up" their Sherman, passing 75mm rounds through the turret loading port. This same port was used for tossing out empty cartridge cases. Hand grenades could be dropped out of the port if enemy infantry pressed a close-in attack.



Tankers among their Shermans, which are undergoing maintenance and repairs: an endless task. The use of goggles was widespread among tankers due to the dust. They sometimes wore "dishpan" Mk 1 helmets when dismounted or when exposed in an open hatch. The tanker in the right foreground does not have a revolver holster so carries his Enfield revolver in a leg pocket fastened to a lanyard. On his belt is a web pouch for the Mk III prismatic compass. 5x No. 2 Mk 2 binoculars hang around his neck.

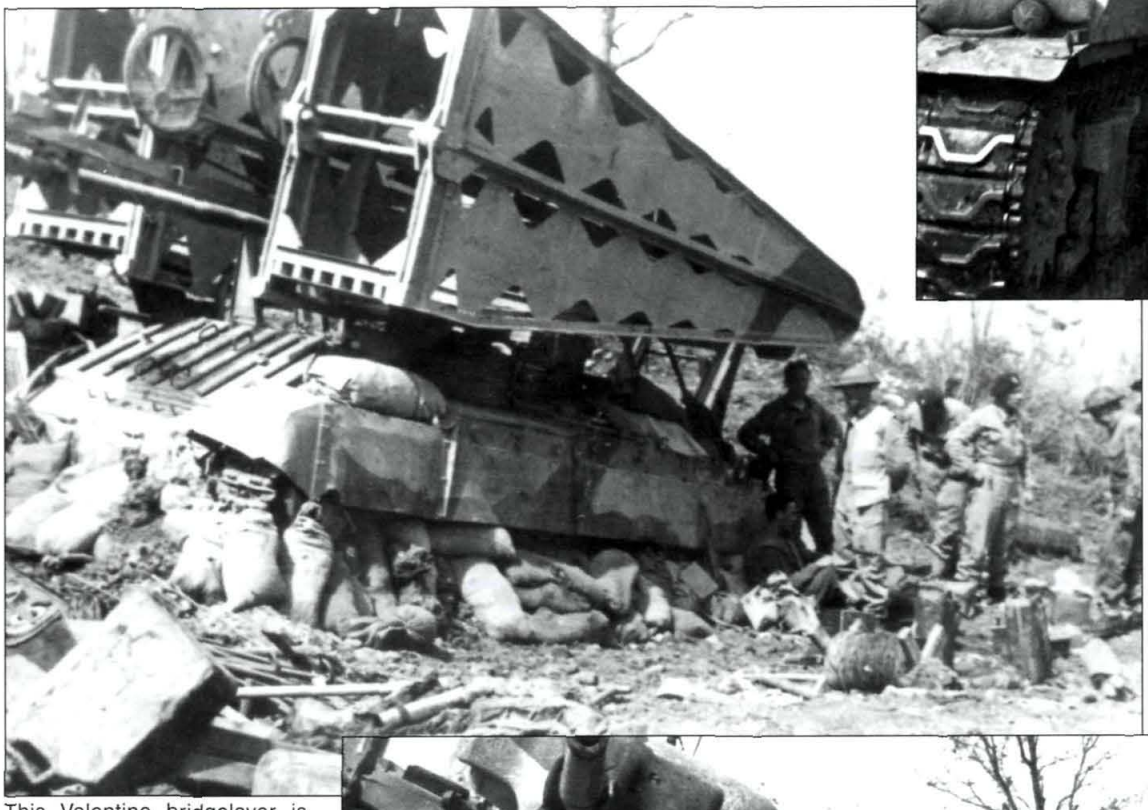
A Sherman tank commander scans for enemy targets and is at the ready to open fire with his Browning .50-cal. M2 machine gun. Its ammunition box held 100 rounds. Intended as an anti-aircraft weapon, it was extremely valuable for engaging ground targets owing to its deep penetration through cover. Some tankers, though, preferred a .30-cal. M1919A4 machine gun as more effective against exposed troops. The British referred to these two machine guns as the 0.50-in. and 0.30-in.

The driver and assistant driver of a Sherman. The latter also operated the bow machine gun and radio. They wear the black protective tanker's helmet made of a molded material and called a "non-crash helmet" as it provided only limited protection. Many of the Polish tanks were solid sand-color, but some were painted with dark green splotches. These often faded and were further subdued by dust.



This 4th Armored Regiment Sherman is nicknamed "Tajfun" (Typhoon) and is marked with the triangular insignia of the regiment's 1st Squadron.

An operation briefing is held beside a Sherman III of the 4th Armored Regiment. The unit's British liaison officer leans on the tank listening to the regiment's deputy commander.



This Valentine bridgelayer is positioned in "'bik" ravine in readiness to be sent forward. Bridging tanks were used to span streams and dry gullies with their 30-ft. long No. 1 scissors bridge. They could handle a 30-ton load. The sandbags stacked around the tracks protect the crew, who slept under their vehicle.

Two battle-damaged Shermans on the approaches to Mass Albanety. Once knocked out and any survivors recovered, they were shoved off the road by tank-dozers or bulldozers.

The same two Shermans. The one to the right does not appear to have suffered mine damage and may have been knocked out by an anti-tank gun. Note the mixture of old and new-type tracks, indicating it had previously suffered mine damage. Its belly escape hatch is open. Later tanks lacked this escape hatch as it was often blown inward when the tank struck a mine: the hatch or the blast could then injure the crew or set off ammunition. The tank to the left suffered catastrophic mine damage, resulting in its turret being blown off.

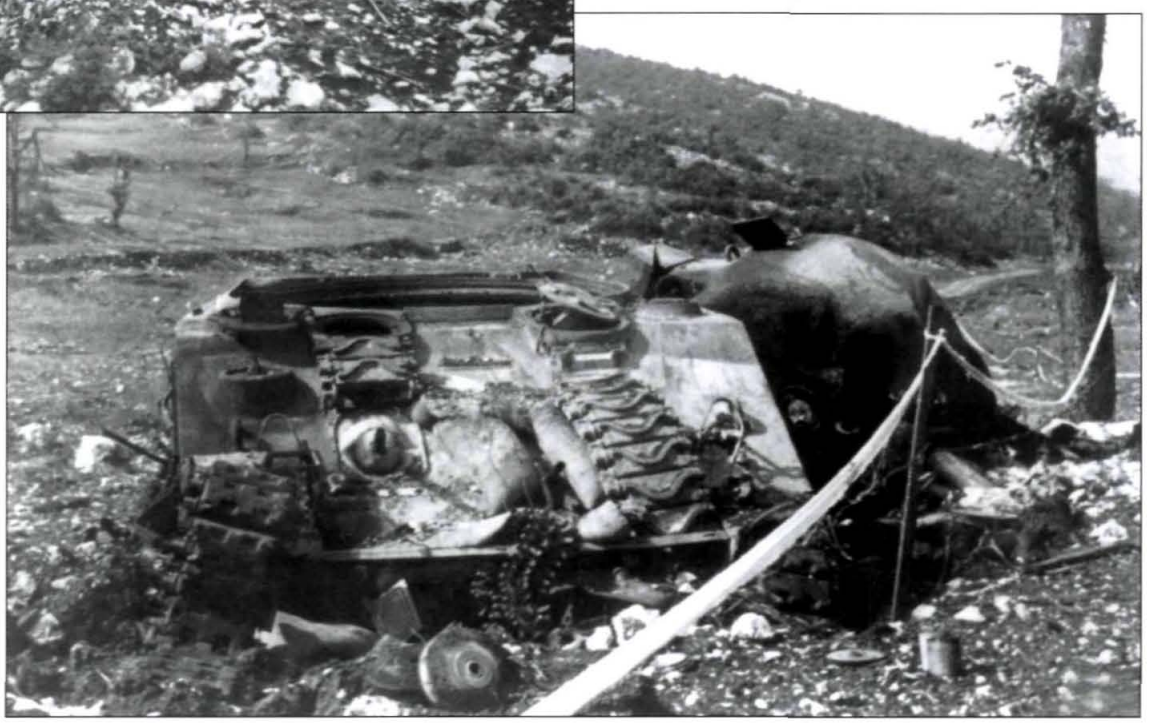
A Sherman III and two Stuart VI tanks destroyed by mines during the attack on Mass Albanety. A gap marked by white engineer tape was cleared through the deadly minefield after the attack. Mines accounted for more Polish tanks than all other weapons combined.

A close-up of the two Stuart VI light tanks. The Stuart was armed with a 37mm M6 main gun, a .30-cal. M1919A5 coaxial machine gun, and an M1919A4 in the bow. One of these tanks was no doubt attempting to rescue the crew of the other when it too met its demise. The Stuart VI was the British designation for the US-made M5 light tank.

The Sherman III seen in the previous photograph with the two Stuarts. In the background is a heavily bomb-blasted castle. Even though battered halfway to the ground, such structures still served as viable strongpoints.

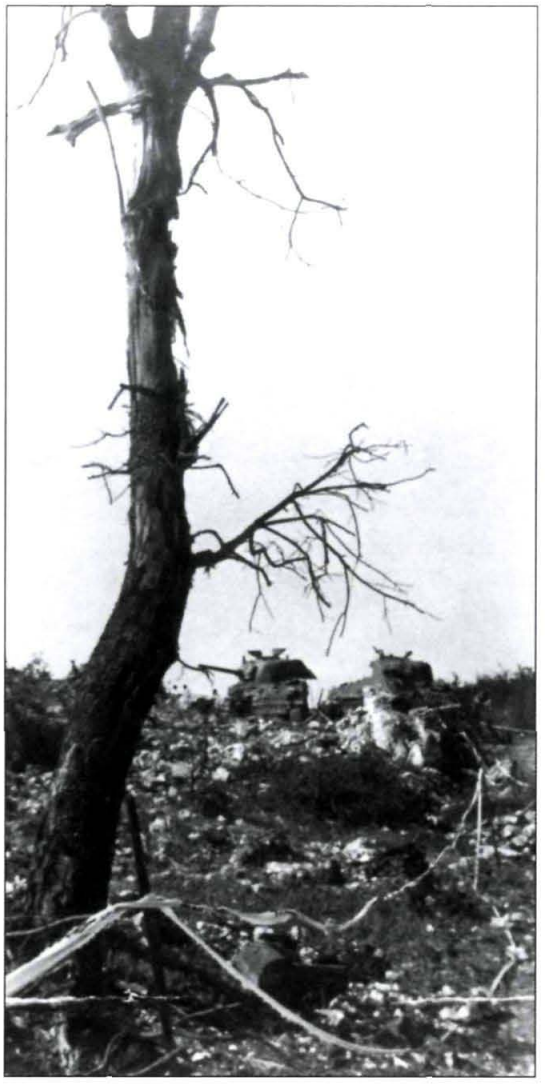
Another hazard was the narrow roads and a tank's stiff steering. This is one example of a Sherman which slid off a road and rolled several times. This may well have been fatal to the entire crew.

Two views of a Sherman destroyed by a mine detonation. The crew are buried behind their tank. Their graves are marked by engineer tape and 75mm cartridge cases serve as headstones. This hulk was later used to create a memorial to the Polish troops who took Monte Cassino.



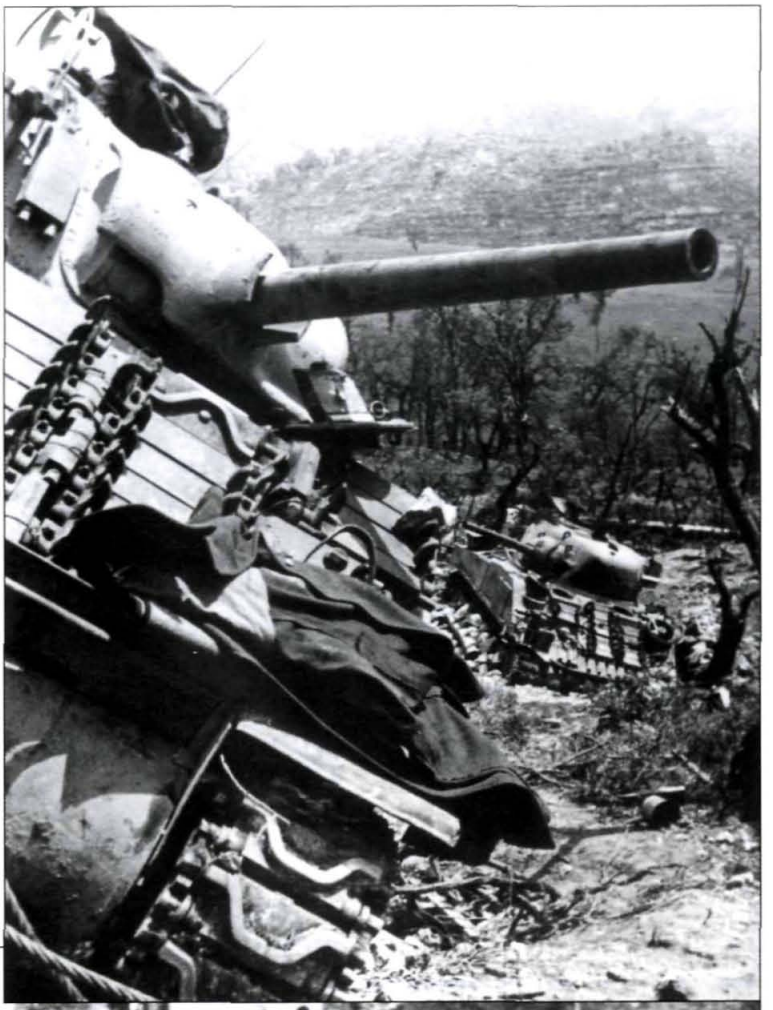
Two mined Shermans. Again, one was attempting to rescue the crew of the other. They are marked with the scorpion insignia of the 4th Armored Regiment. Note the British-installed 4-in. smoke dischargers on the side of the turrets.

Two Shermans, the victims of mines. A great deal of effort was dedicated to clearing routes through the extensive minefields; however, this was often conducted after the battle. The fire-swept ground prevented exposed sappers from clearing routes for attacking tanks. This reality proved costly for the tankers. As it was, the sappers suffered horrible losses. The shell fragment-riddled tree in the foreground attests to the intensity of the fire during the battle.



This Sherman, named "Maczuga", was knocked out by a mine on the outskirts of Piedimonte. The damage was comparatively minor so the crew prepared living accommodations beneath it, accessible by the belly hatch. They protected the gaps between the bogie wheels with rocks and timbers and could provide static fire support. Spare track links and bogie wheels protect the front glacis.

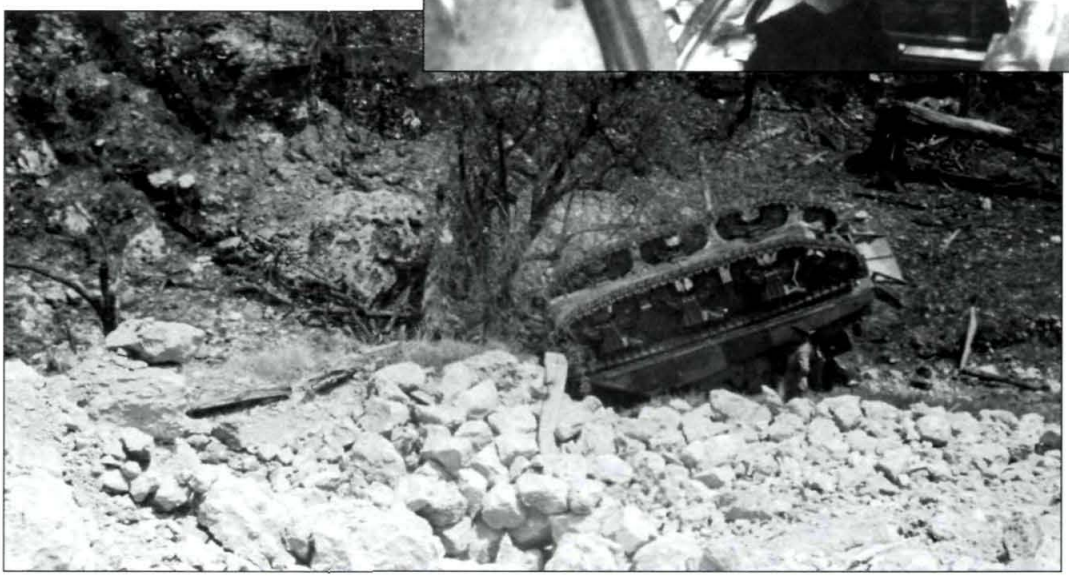
Two Shermans lost to mines. While a mine detonation could be catastrophic and wipe out the crew, sometimes they were comparatively minor. These tanks will be recovered later, repaired, and returned to action to replace other tanks damaged by mines. It was not uncommon for crews to go through several tanks and eventually even have a previous tank returned.



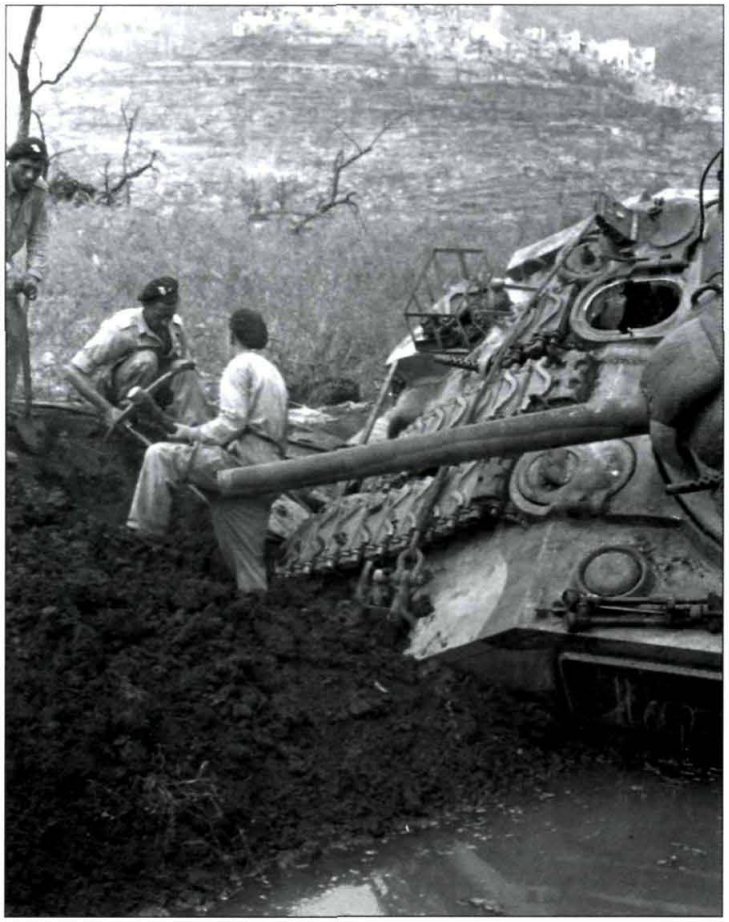
The same two Shermans as in the previous photograph. The equipment storage boxes are a British addition to the American-made tanks. Note the white Polish eagle painted on the front of the infantrymen's helmets. Tankers wore black berets, as did the British Royal Tank Regiment and Royal Armoured Corps, with a similar silver-colored eagle badge over the left eye.

Many turretless Stuart VIs were employed in support roles as medical evacuation vehicles, command post vehicles, and supply and ammunition carriers. This one is partly hidden by a draped camouflage net while the crew has a meal. Note the open small gas stove in the right foreground.

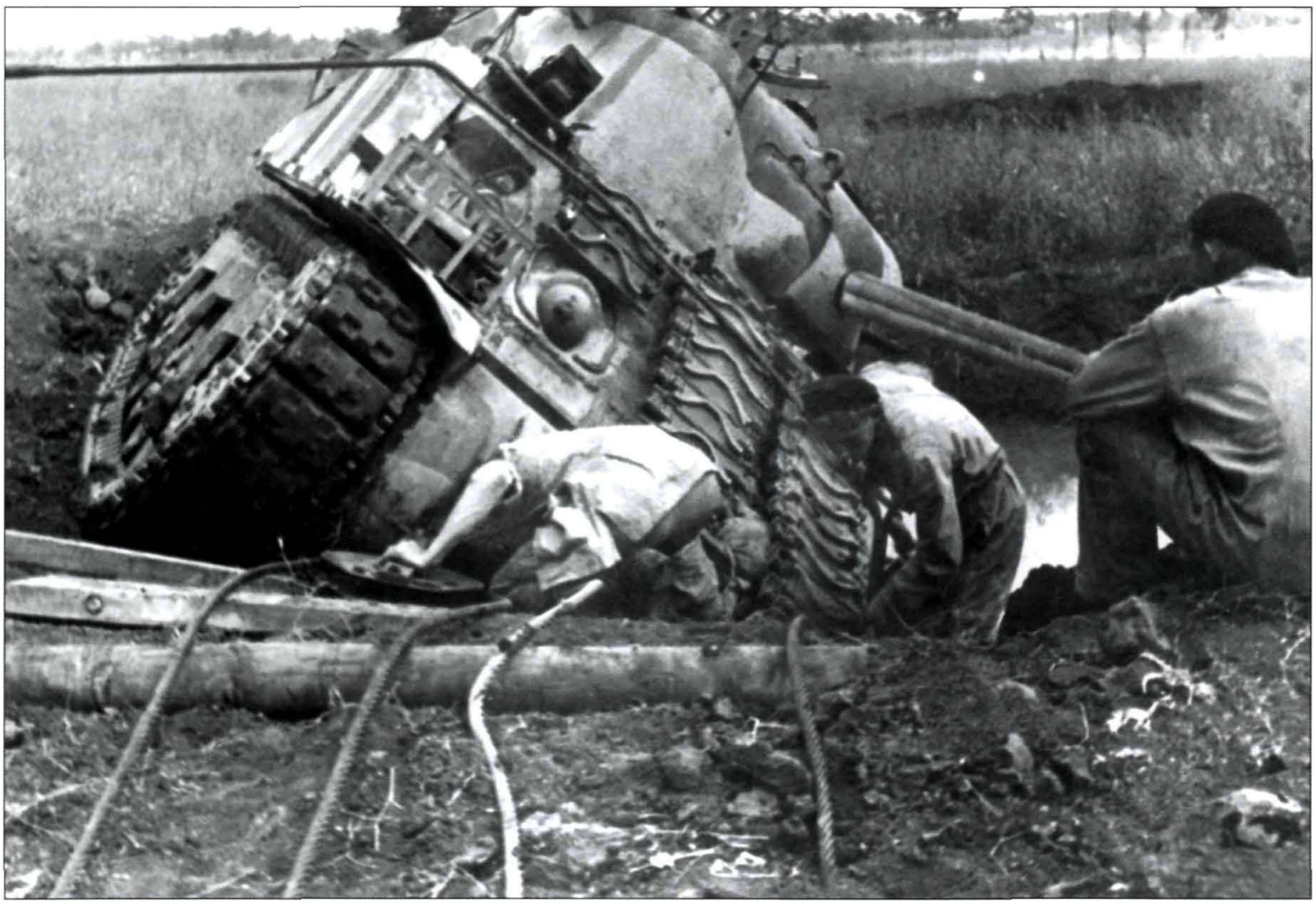
A 4th Armored Regiment Sherman tank crew eats a meal in the shade of a camouflage net while awaiting the order to move out. Note that the underside of the 75mm gun barrel is painted white to prevent a shadow from darkening the underside.



This battle-damaged Sherman was pushed over a hillside to clear a road during the attack.



This Sherman became bogged down in a water-filler bomb crater and proved to be a challenge for the recovery crew. Much of the surrounding area had been saturation bombed by the Allies and the resulting craters often hampered advancing tanks. An M31 tank recovery vehicle, rebuilt using an obsolete M3 Grant medium tank chassis, is used to extract the mired Sherman.



The recovery of a 30-ton Sherman was difficult to say the least, especially on rough terrain. Battle-damaged tanks sometimes had to be dragged from where they were halted to a site accessible to transport vehicles. Here a "de-tracked" Sherman is loaded on to a Cranes recovery trailer towed by a Scammell Pioneer 6x4 recovery tractor. The latter was known as a "Scammel" or "breakdown tractor."

A camouflage-painted Sherman III displaying the retrofitted equipment storage boxes on the rear of the turret and hull. Note the metal tool and repair parts case and the fuel funnel on the rear engine deck.

Repairs being made on a mine-damaged tank. This could require many hours of hard work.

Tanks would park hard up against buildings to make them less conspicuous to ground and air observation.

This German 7.5cm Pak 40 anti-tank gun appears to have been pulled inside the Monte Cassino monastery from its exposed firing position, only to be destroyed during one of many aerial bombardments.

The northern approach to the Monte Cassino Abbey atop what was known as Monastery Hill, which once passed through park-like forested grounds. The extent of aerial bombardment and artillery shelling can be appreciated.

This former Italian 75/18 Semovente self-propelled gun used by the 278.Infanterie-Division was knocked out in one of the many skirmishes during the German retreat from the Monte Cassino area. While appearing similar to the German assault gun in appearance, it was not as heavily armored; Semovente means "self-propelled."

A 7.5cm gun-armed Panther tank turret emplaced in a concrete emplacement, which the Germans formally called a "Panzerstellung" (armor position) and informally a "Panzerturm" (armor turret). These were difficult to detect from the air or ground and equally hard to hit with artillery, requiring a direct hit to knock out. This one has been hit by concentrated fire. Before engagement they were well-concealed with natural and manmade camouflage. In the distance is one of its victims.

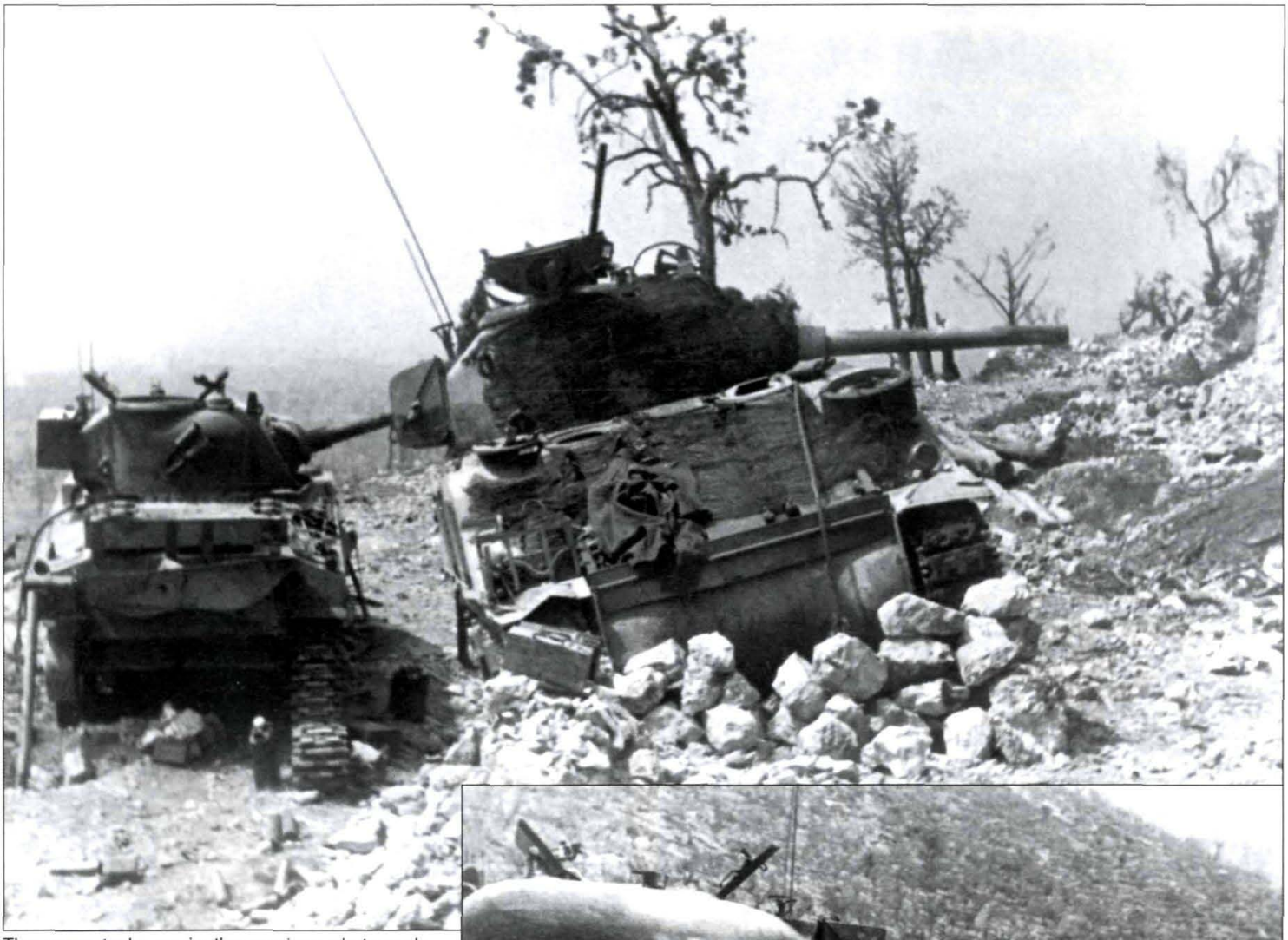
A fallen Polish soldier lies amid the rubble and battlefield litter on the approaches to Piedimonte.

The Poles modified this turretless Stuart VI as a casualty evacuation vehicle. This photograph was taken just after the capture of Piedimonte.

A damaged Sherman in Piedimonte provides a good view of the retrofitted turret storage box. This tank mounts an M1919A4 machine gun on the turret top. The angular object on the engine deck above the serial number is a fuel-filler funnel. Empty 75mm cartridge cases and black fiberboard packing tubes litter the ground.

A Sherman pulled into a forward firing position among the ruins of Piedimonte to provide fire support. A canvas tarp has been stretched over the bow to break-up its outline.

Knocked out Shermans in Piedimonte. One kept going until it had almost run off its broken track, a situation the crew may not have initially realized. The tanker in the left foreground wears the denim tank suit and has a web holster with six cartridge loops for his Enfield 0.38-in. No. 2 Mk 1 revolver. The low slung holster, called a "pistol case," was standard issue to British tankers making the revolver more accessible from a seated position.

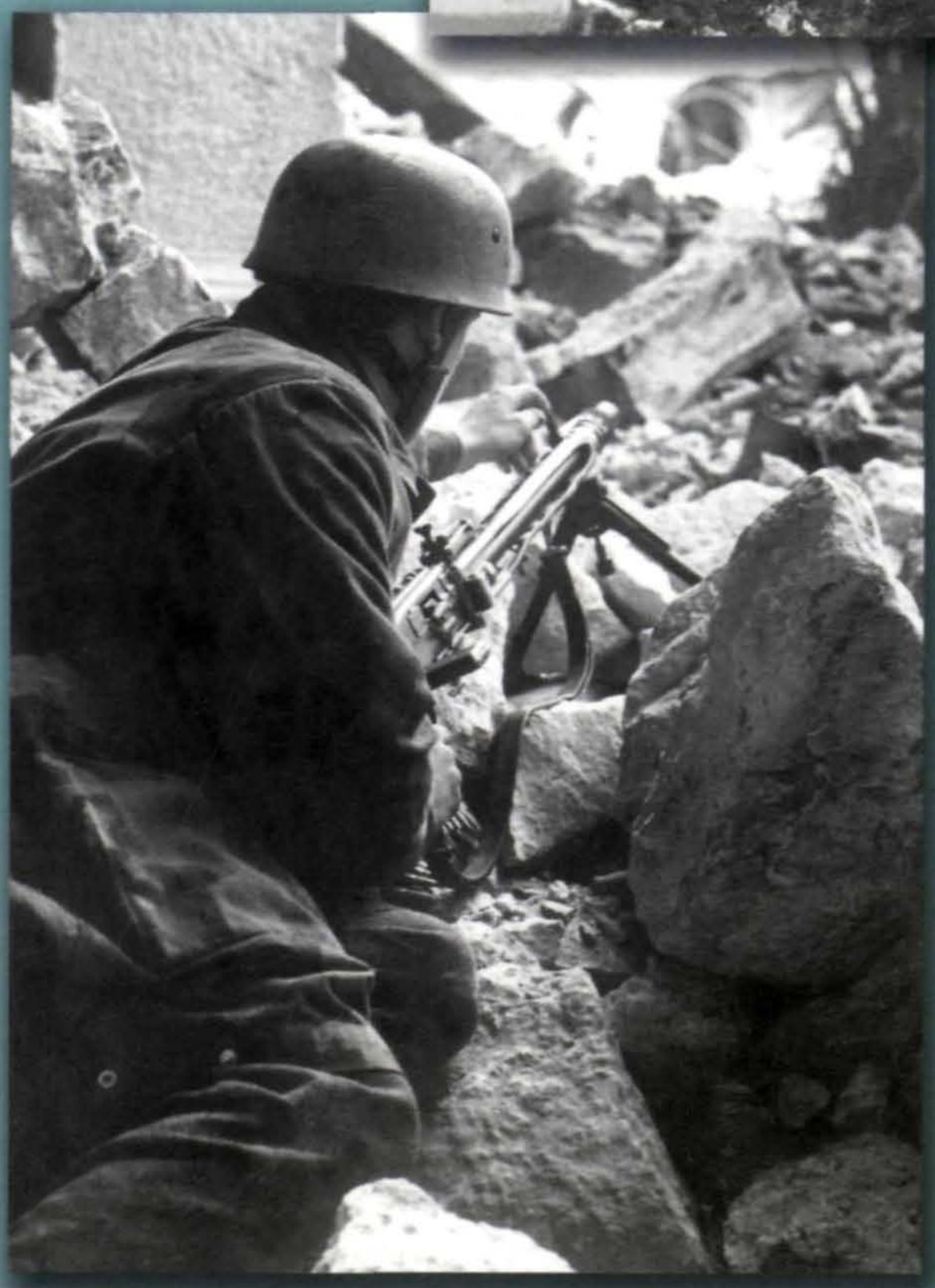


The same tanks as in the previous photograph. Owing to intense enemy fire tank crews sometimes sought shelter under their knocked out tank rather than attempting to flee under fire. They would await the cover of darkness and in some instances even "fortify" their position and hold out until friendly troops were able to advance.

The commander of the 2nd Armored Brigade, Major-General Bronislaw Rakowski, and his staff visit forward positions in Piedimonte. Numerous knocked out tanks can be seen in the background, attesting to the viciousness of the battle. The fight for Piedimonte cost the Poles 13 tanks destroyed and 17 damaged plus 86 tankers dead or wounded.

A camouflaged II Polish Corps (II Korpus) jeep bearing the commander of the Polish armed forces in the west, General Kazimierz Sosnkowski, undertakes an inspection tour. An M3A1 scout car is part of his escort.

Polish reconnaissance troops enter Ancona in an American-made M3A1 White scout car. While no longer used by the US, large numbers were provided to Free Polish and French units and it saw some use by the British. It is followed by a 37mm gun-armed Staghound I armored car. The four-wheel Staghound was designed and built in the US as the T17E1, but was not used by US forces. It did equip British and Polish reconnaissance units.



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